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BERT WITVOET

A crib for a bed

"Recreating the scene of Christ's birth is one of the most tender and enduring Christmas traditions," we read in an article called "Reflections on Nativity Scenes." "Making representations of the Nativity is a universally popular art form which has flourished in Europe since the 16th century."

The creche featured on this page was made in El Salvador, and shows the simplicity of the folk-art colors and shapes typical to this region of Central America. It is owned by Marian Van Til and Ed Cassidy.

Although displaying creches, also called tableaux, is a fairly recent practice in Protestant circles (there still is a lingering suspicion among some that they are connected with image worship), the appreciation of liturgical art and the familiarity with drawings of the Nativity scene has removed earlier barriers. As reminders of the central event of Christmas, they are an improvement on Santa Clauses and Christmas trees.

Would Christ mind very much if by looking at this display our thoughts would go to the people of Central America, particularly Honduras and Nicaragua, after the horrific upheaval that Hurricane Mitch caused, and the general economic and political difficulties experienced in this region? "Whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers, you did for me."

Be near them, Lord Jesus, we ask you to stay close by them forever, and love them, we pray.

BW

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The sounds of Christmas in Cagayan de Oro City, the Philippines

Bruce Adema

"I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, just like the ones I used to know...." While driving through the bustling streets of the city, with the air conditioning set on high in a vain attempt to beat back the unrelenting heat, the words of the song flow out of the radio. In a land of riotous tropical flowers, of palm trees reaching up to incredible heights, and of the ocean stretching out to the horizon in dazzling blueness, curiously, this song is the people's favorite.

Wondering about what meaning folks with no experience or conception of frost or snow would apply to it, I asked several acquaintances at our church, Living Hope Christian Fellowship: "What do you think of when you hear this song?"

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The Adema family.

Peace, not snow

"White is the color of peace and hope," they replied. "It represents the love and fellowship of the season. The song reminds us of the love of God in sending his Son to earth, and encourages us that with the Lord all our Christmasses — and all our lives — may be white!"

Now this song, previously for me a banal secular ditty about cold temperatures and crystalized precipitation, has been transformed into a hymn of grace and a truly beautiful part of the sound of the season. Perhaps that is the Filipino gift: take what others find ordinary and caste it into a striking and memorable mold. Once again, the people of the Philippines have been a blessing to me.

Outside the gates of every house in the city and at every busy intersections where vehicles, trapped by red lights and the congestion of the traffic, idle together, the sound is heard: boom boom boom; tap tap tap. Small groups of people, adults and children, clothing ragged and faces grimy, join their voices together in tuneless, joyless chants. Their hands stretch out and their eyes plead for generosity from the fortunate behind the gates of the houses and in the cars, jeepneys and buses of the streets.

> *"White is the color of peace and hope," they replied. "It represents the love and fellowship of the season."*

The *mananaygan* — Christmas carolers — have returned, descending from the surrounding mountains to collect pesos from the people of the city. Armed with drums made from bamboo and with a determination to survive at whatever cost to personal dignity, their sounds, too, are part of the season.

Hearing the carols of the mananaygan makes me wonder : what would songs of faith and love for the One who is the "reason for the season" sound like from these poor and hopeless people? I'm sure that knowing that Jesus came for them, that he loves them, and that he stands ready to be in a love relationship with them, would change not only the expression on their faces but the sound of their music as well. Pray for them, and for all trapped by the disharmonies of a fallen world.

For the people of Cagayan de Oro City, the Christmas season is a time of parties. Employees get together for the company Christmas party. Neighbors get together for the barangay (neighborhood) Christmas party. Families get together for the family Christmas party. Churches get together for the church Christmas party. You get the idea!

Karaoke everywhere

No Christmas party would be complete without a karaoke machine. Up and down the streets singers of varying skill levels can be heard crooning at high volume to the clapping, laughing, encouraging or good natured teasing from the other party goers. While church parties are "dry," many others are lubricated by profuse amounts of rum and beer. As the amount of liquor consumed goes up, the quality of the singing goes down. Unfortunately, the singers don't seem to realize it, and their enthusiasm for their songs only increases. Eventually the party ends, to the relief of the people living nearby.

While the unrestrained alcohol consumption of many party goers is certainly unfortunate, the people of the Philippines are right about this: Christmas is a time for celebration, for fellowship, for giving. It's a time for singing, for encouraging one another in our songs, for laughing at our cracking voices while recognizing the truth of the message of grace and peace with God. We look forward to the day when Jesus, the inspiration for our sounds of the season, will return, and all his people, of every tribe and nation and language, will be filled with the Spirit of God and continue the party of grace.

Hummmm. Ready — sing: "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas...."

Bruce Adema is a church planter in the Philippines for Christian Reformed World Missions.

Christmas Present

(A meditation on Genesis 28:10-17 and Matthew 1:23)

Joe Veltman

In Matthew 1:23, the angel quotes the prophet Isaiah, announcing that the Messiah was to be called "Immanuel — which means 'God with us.'" Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. He was not only God with the Shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and later, his disciples. He is not only the God who will be with us when he returns. He is with us right now.

As he ascended, Jesus promised: "I am with you, even to the close of the age." That is to say, "I am Emmanuel, God with you, at all times."

The theme of this meditation is "Christmas Present." It is a multiple play on words, which reads so many ways I almost confuse myself. God's Christmas present is also ours in this present Christmas. The gift, once again, is that his Son is present.

Jesus is among us. And, if you have Christ in your heart, he is within you as well. We, in turn, are called to "present" ourselves to God.

Live the present

I heard a phrase some time ago that stuck with me. The speaker was urging his listeners to be "present to the moment." I invite you to be present to this moment. To focus on the here and now, even as you read. In particular, I urge you to be present to the momentous presence of God.

You can dwell on the past and lose the present in your memories. You can so worry about the future, or even get so excited about the future, that you can't appreciate the present. How easy it is to become absentminded!

But if you can't appreciate the present, you can't celebrate it either. Look around you. What do you see that you give thanks for? Do you see any festive decorations? Are you enjoying them? Are you listening to music? Do you hear it?

Consider the people in your life. Aren't you glad they are there? What are you doing right now? What a privilege to meditate on the Word of God! Most important, are you conscious of the fact that right now, at this very moment, Jesus is present with you?

Jacob had a vision of a ladder connecting heaven and earth. When he woke up, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16). Wherever you are as you read this, wake up to the knowledge that God is in that place.

As you go to your place of worship this Christmas, I invite you to be especially sensitive to the presence of the Lord in that place.

God's guests

From time to time we have special guests in church, and we welcome them and announce their presence. But every Sunday we are the guests of God, who is with us. We could advertise in the newspaper each Sunday: "Come and worship with us. Jesus will be here." As you go to church, be sure to enter into worship. Carry with you the words of Jacob, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17). Not because it is a special place, but because Jesus is there, who is Door of the sheep and Way to God.

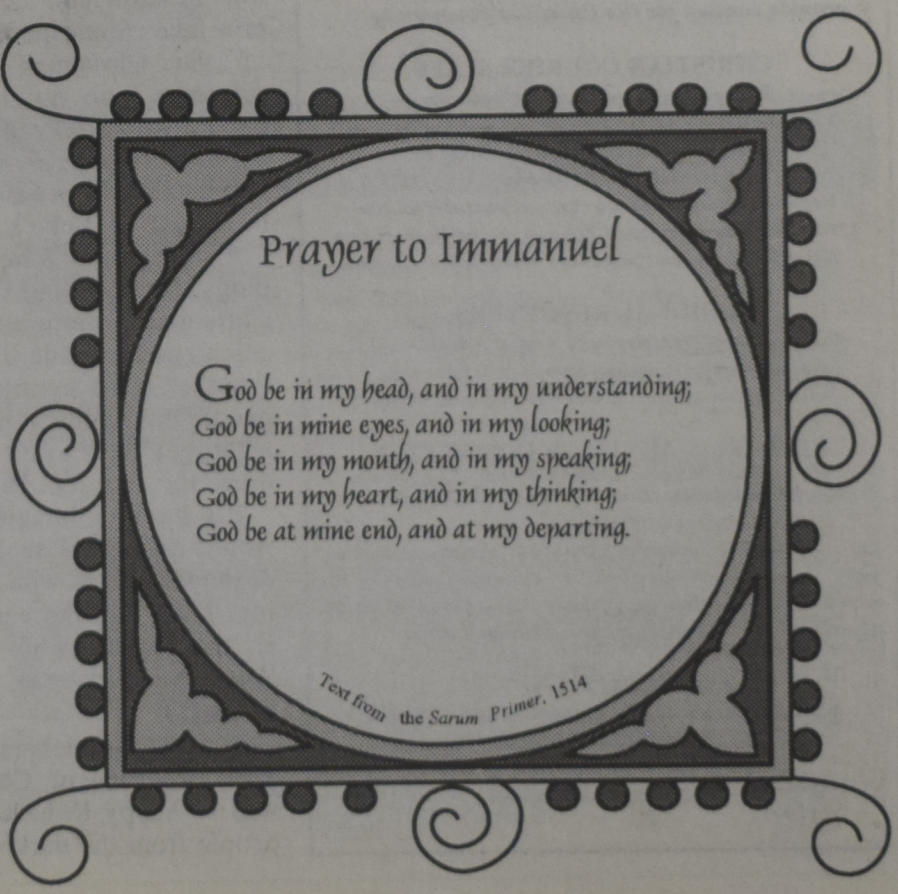
Before reading the rest of this meditation, I invite you to close your eyes, and think quietly about the nearness, the presence of God in Christ right now.

Jesus is over you, that you should obey him; Jesus is under you, to support you; Jesus is beside you, to comfort you; Jesus is before you, to guide you; Jesus is behind you, to encourage you; Jesus is around you, to protect you; Jesus is in you, to make you holy.

Jesus is everywhere present to be your Savior from sin. He is even in the presence of the Father to pray for you, and beside him on his throne to direct all things for your good.

You may want to close with this prayer: Thank you, Father, for sending us a Savior to die and rise for us. Thank you Jesus, for being always our Immanuel, God with us. Thank you, O Holy Spirit, for this present, festive moment. Today I rejoice, and celebrate with you. Amen.

Joe Veltman is pastor of the Maitland Community Reformed Church, in Maitland, Ontario



Christmas Editorial

Unlimited peace for a limited people

The most striking feature in the Luke account of the birth of Jesus is the emphasis on joy and praise. God sure wanted the coming of the Savior into the world to be a special and happy event. The birth was preceded by angel visits to the priest Zechariah, to the virgin Mary and to the carpenter Joseph (actually, the latter visit is recorded in Matthew not Luke). In each case the angel told the visitant not to be afraid, and he let each one know that he was the bearer of good news. Both Mary and Zechariah break into a song of praise when the reality of the prophetic message hits home.

Then there is that unforgettable scene of an angel bringing "good news of great joy" to a group of shepherds out in the fields of Ephratah, and a mass choir of angels singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Many hymn writers of various nationalities have tried to capture the beauty of that song. Those of Dutch extraction sometimes think they have a leg up on everyone with their "Ere zij God." But we can safely assume that no one can come close to the original production.

What a picture of joy and exuberant praise that was! God was really excited about this birth!

Recreating the vitality

Doctor Luke considers his writing "an orderly account," written for the benefit of someone he addresses as "most excellent Theophilus" for the purpose of strengthening his reader's faith. But we are not to conclude that "orderly" means suppressing the emotions that surrounded the birth of Jesus. Perhaps Theophilus (which means "lover of God") had heard snatches of the life of Jesus but never a story that started with the birth and ended with the Ascension. It's a story ordered chronologically. For the rest, it takes on the vitality of surprising, unusual events.

In keeping with this theme of joy and praise, Christians all over the world seek to experience the happiness of the birth of Christ during the Christmas season. They immerse themselves in Christmas hymns and Christmas stories. This very issue of *Christian Courier* attempts to recreate the joy of the very first "Christmas."

The pain of contrast

But actually experiencing the joy of Christmas is not always an easy task. For those who associate this time of year with a loved one's death or a very unpleasant memory of separation, strife or abuse, Christmas joy can be a rare commodity. I cannot imagine that the Trudeau family will be able to celebrate Christmas with much joy, knowing that a loved one lies buried under tons of snow and ice in an inhospitable mountain lake. Some people hate the very thought of the Christmas season. I know some prisoners who do; I also know some single people who do. Probably the greatest suppressor of Christmas joy is loneliness.

That is not because of the message that can be found in Luke's account of the birth of Christ. Rather, it's because of the cultural trappings that surround Christmas. In our society, Christmas is more a family day and a time of celebration and fun than it is a Bethlehem day. It's the sharp contrast between what lonely people think most other people experience and what they have to go through that makes them dread the month of December.

It's hard to imagine that the angels' song would make this such a difficult time. Think of the shepherds who went on their way rejoicing. These are the very people, disadvantaged as they were, who would have found our Western Christmas a difficult feast to celebrate!

But the Bethlehem message, that emerges after centuries of Christmasses, is that God was so happy to have found a way of saving people from the darkness of sin and death that he provided his own balloons and birthday cake to make sure that we would never forget. For God there was glory; for people who pleased God there was peace.

Peace! I think of Sacha Trudeau's comments when he arrived in Nelson, B.C., a few weeks ago to await the finding of his brother's body: "On cherche la paix" (we're looking for peace). That's true for all of us in this sin-ridden, pain-filled world. The people of Honduras and Nicaragua, Iraq and Kosovo are also looking for peace. Peace of mind and peace of body. God offers eternal peace for body, mind and soul.

The channel of peace

Zechariah eloquently describes the source of that peace in his Spirit-inspired prophetic song: it is "the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." God's tender mercy is the source of our peace. Only those who seek that tender mercy or are overtaken by it in God's relentless pursuit of sinners will find peace.

There are all kinds of indications in the Christmas story that the peace of the Christ Child is not for all people. It is "offered" to all people, but it does not automatically go to all people. The angels' song, which has so often been mistakenly rendered as "on earth peace, and goodwill to all people" actually says: "on earth peace to people in whom he is well pleased." God's peace is a channelled peace. It's a river, not an indiscriminate flood. It flows through the birth, cross and resurrection of Christ.

Zechariah's song affirms that exclusivity of God's peace when it says: that little John (whom we know as John the Baptist) will prepare the way for Jesus (the one who will "guide our feet into the path of peace") by giving Jesus' people "the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins." Salvation through the forgiveness of our sins is the channel of God's peace.

The angel of God never announced a United Nations peace king either. He always ties the birth and reign of Christ to the throne and house of David. Israel, which in the New Testament is understood to be the people of God throughout the world, is the realm of peace.

How much of our celebration of Jesus' birth is still salvation celebration? How much of it proclaims the peace of God through the forgiveness of sins?

O may we keep and ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind!
Saved by his love, unceasing we shall sing
eternal praise to heaven's almighty King.

BW

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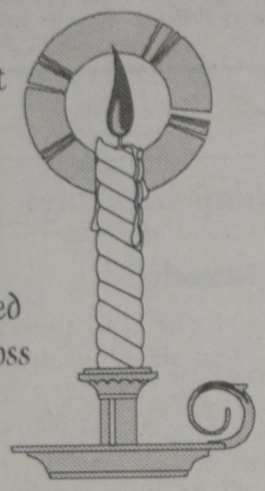

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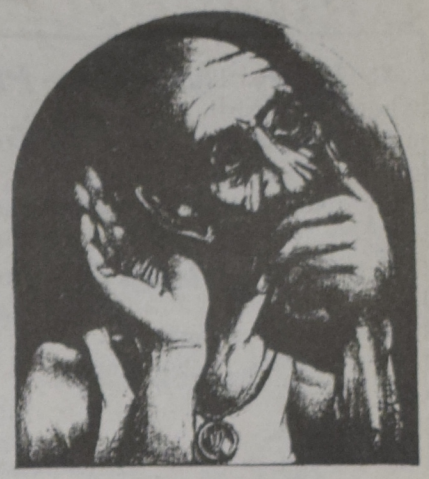

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A Message to Our Readers

Change

"To everything there is a season," said the Preacher. For years *Christian Courier* has called itself "North America's only Reformed weekly." That "season" will come to an end this year on New Year's Eve. Beginning with the January 11, 1999, issue, *Christian Courier* will become a bi-weekly publication — appearing every two weeks throughout the year.

More Change

Along with this change will come some others. Since subscribers in 1999 will be receiving 26 issues instead of the 44 we published in 1998, we are dropping the price of a new one-year subscription to $36.95 (+ GST). Today's subscribers will receive up to two months extension on their current subscription when they renew the next time. It's our "thank you" to our many dedicated supporters.

Still More Change

Christian Courier will still be prepared using the same familiar ingredients. But the final product promises to be crisper, tangyer, and more nourishing. How will we do it? You ask. Sorry, the recipe is a guarded family secret. Just keep reading *Christian Courier*. Observe the changes. Notice how spiffy the full color issues look. Check the flavor of the commentary, the whisper of differing opinions, the pleasant bite of humor, the incense of transition. "Stay tuned," we're saying.

And Then A Really Big Change

We need to grow in 1999. Our marketing focus must be both a broader Reformed market and a wider CRC readership (especially younger members). Our editorial focus will begin to move in this direction also, as we seek to replace our retiring editor-in-chief, Bert Witvoet.

1999 will be a year of change at* Christian Courier, *no doubt about it. We invite your suggestions for change and ask for your continued support through subscription renewals, gift subscriptions, tax-receiptable donations to Reformed Faith Witness (our parent) and the placement of advertising and announcements.

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"...in Him all things hold together." Col. 1:17

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Wanted: Pinecones

Beatrice Vandervelde

"Look for pinecones," Mrs. Van tells her class. "We need lots of pinecones — all kinds and sizes."

"Why?" Kathryn asks. "Why do you need pinecones?"

"For a wreath. If we find lots of pinecones, we can make a wreath for our classroom door."

The children are excited. "A contest. A contest," they shout. "Who can find the most?"

When Kathryn comes home after school, she is amazed to see hundreds of pinecones in the top of their very own evergreen tree. If only she can bring those! But *how*?

She runs down their long drive .... and rushes inside. "Mom, how can I get taller?" she gasps, almost out of breath.

"By lifting your arm into the air?" he Mom guesses. "By standing on a box? By...."

"That's not tall enough," Kathryn interrupts. "I have to be as tall as a giraffe."

"That's going to be tough," her Mom says. "Maybe Daddy will have an idea."

When her father comes home, Kathryn pounces on him like a kitten on a ball of moving yarn. "Daddy, how can I get taller?" she asks before he is even halfway out of the car.

"It takes time, honey," he says. He bends to give her a kiss, then races up the porch steps, two at a time.

"I need to be as tall as a giraffe *now*" she shouts, her face turning as red as the firetrucks her Daddy just left behind.

Her Daddy looks back. He sees her red face. "If you stand on a ladder, will you be a tall enough giraffe?" he asks gently.

"Oh yes, Daddy, yes," Kathryn sings. She gives him a quick hug, then runs to the garage. She tugs and tugs, dragging the ladder to the tree. Then she struggles to push it up.

No go.

Kathryn dashes inside. "How can I get stronger?"

"By eating your spinach," her Mom quips, washing a batch of the green leaves. Kathryn pulls a face.

"By using your muscles regularly," her Dad aswers.

"Oh, Daddy," she wails. "I need strong muscles *now*."

Her Dad gulps down the last of his coffee. "What's going on?" he asks. "Why do you need to be as tall as a giraffe one moment and as strong as a--, a---, an ox the next." He swings Kathryn onto his knee and waits. "Tell me. What is this all about?"

So Kathryn explains all in one breath, "I need to be as strong as an ox so I can lift the ladder so I can be as tall as a giraffe so I can reach the pinecones at the top of our evergreen tree."

Her Dad's eyes glaze. He sits a moment, shakes his head as if to clear it, then asks, "Run that by me again?"

"I need to be as strong as an ox so I can lift the ladder so I can be as tall as a giraffe so I can reach the pinecones at the top of our evergreen tree," Kathryn repeats, a little louder this time.

"That's what I thought you said," her Dad mutters. He sits some more, then shrugs. "Right. How can I help?"

"Are you as strong as an ox, Daddy?" Kathryn asks hopefully.

Her Dad stands up. He sets Kathryn on the floor and flexes his muscles. "Yes, I feel as strong as an ox right now. Show me where I'm needed."

Kathryn leads the way outside. Soon the ladder is leaning against the huge boughs of their majestic pine and Kathryn is on her way up. But the branches are too springy. Even with her Daddy holding it, the ladder sways dangerously as Kathryn climbs up, one step at a time.

"It's not safe, Kathryn," he warns.

"Then what?" Kathryn cries as she jumps down. "How am I ever going to get those pinecones?"

"Could you climb the trunk?"

Kathryn climbs onto the first branch. She climbs onto the second branch, then onto a third. The branches are close together, so close she can't straighten her head. If she straightens her head, her back has to bend the wrong way. There is no way Kathryn can bend her body around all the branches to make her way up.

"Let's think about it over supper," her Dad suggests. He leaves to read the paper.

But Kathryn can't wait. She wants those pinecones. She wants them *now*!

With half-closed eyes she studies the tree. Hmm! The branches look like giant steps.

From the top of the stepladder Kathryn jumps onto the nearest bough. It bends w a y down and immediately she slides toward the edge. Wildly she grabs onto the pine needles, desperate to hang on.

There she lies, stretched across the branch. That's when she realizes there is no way she will be going up. The only way she can go is down. Slowly she lets herself slide, bumping from one branch to another, until she lands on the ground with a plop.

Ouch!

Her bum hurts, her fingers are sore, her pants and jacket are covered with sticky resin, and it is getting dark.

"But I won't give up," Kathryn says stubbornly.

That night Kathryn has a wonderful dream. Sailing through the sky in a hot air balloon, she skims over houses and cars and trees so tiny they look like her little brother's toys.

The memory of her dream makes her smile. Suddenly she remembers her quest for pinecones. A hot-air balloon? She shoots out of bed like a jack-rabbit.

"Not today, dearest," her Mom warns. "Look at the wind. It's much too strong."

Kathryn looks. But Kathryn doesn't notice the wind. What *she* notices is a long, red fire truck.

"Daddy," she yells. "Look what Daddy brought." She rushes to get her basket, then races outside.

"Oh, all right," her father agrees as he sets down the neighbor's kitten he's just rescued. Lifting Kathryn into the cherry picker, he says, "Up you go, little one." With a whir she goes high as the trees. With jerky jolts she is moved sideways till she is right beside the pinecones.

Kathryn picks pinecones, one after another, until her basket is full to the brim and she has long ago lost count.

Suddenly she stops in alarm.

"What's the matter?" her Daddy asks.

"The door will be too small," Kathryn giggles. "Oh, Daddy, my teacher will have to get a bigger door." And she and her Daddy laugh and laugh.

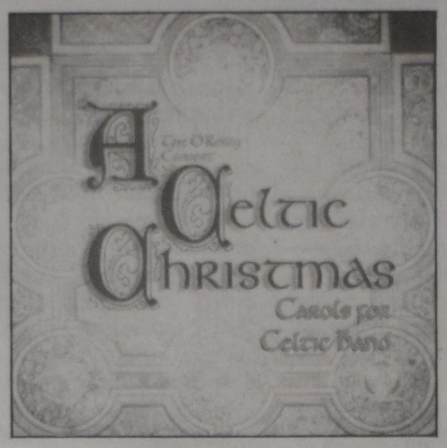
Beatrice Vandervelde is a part-time teacher of Grade 3 at Willowdale Christian School in Toronto. The illustrations for her story were done by her daughter-in-law, Jeannie Merkel of Norfolk, Virginia.

A restful gift from the Emerald

A Celtic Christmas: Carols for Celtic Band

The O'Reilly Consort

Platinum Entertainment, Inc. Distributed by Intersound, Roswell, Georgia, and by Intersound Distribution in Canada, 1 Select Ave., Unit 10, Scarborough, ON M1V 5J3. (Website: platinumcd.com)



The O'Reilly Consort consists of five members with the quite un-Celtic names of Lisa Edwards (vocals), John Maschinot (flute, uilleann pipes and tin whistle), Sarah Vegotsky (fiddle), David Patterson (guitar and harmonium), and Ray Campagnoli (bodhran and tine whistle). Guest performer Kelly Stewart on Celtic harp joins on two tracks.

Perhaps the multi-ethnic nature of this group which specializes in Celtic folk music says something about the music's international appeal. It has both an infectious vitality and, especially in its slower, contemplative forms, emotional power.

The Irish and Scots trace their roots back to the ancient Celts. Christianity came to Ireland in the 5th century, brought by St. Patrick; and thanks to the Christian monks, the Irish early became a literate people. But that didn't mean that the pagan Celts did not continue to influence the culture.

One late example of such syncretism is the lively carol "Rorate coeli super!" ("Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day") which begins this album. Written in the 16th century by Scottish poet William Dunbar, its Latin title is a reference to a part of the Advent liturgy: "Drop down dew, O heavens from above, and may the clouds rain down righteousness." But God the Creator, the Virgin Mary, the Sun, and Nature in general are all celebrated together here in a marriage of ancient Celtic and Christian beliefs (a marriage which is being renewed by some in our own time).

Other carols here are specifically Christian, some being moving expressions of both personal and communal faith.

"Good People All," also known as "The Wexford Carol" is a melodically haunting carol with an Irish tune and English text celebrating "what our good God for us has done/In sending his beloved Son." While Lisa Edwards sings it pleasantly enough, the rendition here modernizes and smooths over the "awkward" melodic intervals and accompanying harmonies that normally help make this beautiful, biblical carol so emotionally gripping.

That softening of the harmonic edges, which occurs here and there throughout the CD, is to be regretted both from an authentic musical point of view and because of the lessened emotional impact. (Perhaps many modern listeners will find it more immediately pleasing.) Still, this is an adept band, and the performances are not lacking in skill or spirit.

The CD liner helpfully includes short, informative blurbs about each of the tracks. Within the framework of the flutes, fiddle, guitar and drums of Irish band, there is a great deal of variety in the 12 tracks here. Some numbers are purely instrumental: fiddle predominating; or pipes and tin whistle; or harp. Then there are the pleasures of Edwards' clear, agile voice, sometimes accompanied only very discreetly so as to be almost *a cappella*.

Though there are a few exuberant numbers, most of the music here is restful and contemplative — a kind of quiet praise.

With renewed interest in folk music of all kinds in our time, music with Celtic roots is no longer unfamiliar to the average audience. If you like such music in general, you'll undoubtedly enjoy this Christmas album.

Great variety, good quality at a low price

Christmas Classics: Carols for Symphonic Orchestra

Intersound Inc. (P.O. Box 1724, Roswell, GA 30077; distributed in Canada by Intersound Inc., 1 Select Ave., Unit 10, Scarborough, ON M1V 5J3. $11.99 Cdn. Available at Sam the Record Man.

This is one of a series of budget Christmas releases on compact disc produced by Intersound. This CD combines a variety of orchestral music that is "seasonal" in that it calls up images associated with winter and Christmas.

Thus, the 13 selections include Leopold Mozart's delightful "Sleigh Ride,"; W.A. Mozart's "Sleigh Ride" from "Three German Dances"; six tracks of ballet music by Tchaikovsky: the "Snowflake Waltz" from *The Nutcracker* and selections from *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*; Bach's Sinfonia from the "Christmas Oratorio"; two pieces by Handel: "Joy to the World" and "Hallelujah" from *Messiah*; and Schubert's famous "Ave Maria."

Schlepping with Schubert

With one exception, the performances/arrangements by a variety of ensembles are uniformly good. The American, British and German orchestras, some from smaller cities, are excellent groups if not absolutely top drawer: the Rochester (New York) Philharmonic, the Houston Symphony, the London Festival Orchestra, the Stuttgart Radio Symphony, the Royal Promenade Orchestra, the Smithsonian Concerto Grosso and the Florida Symphonic Pops.

The exception is that last group, though the fault lies not so much with the orchestra as with the arrangement it plays of Schubert's "Ave Maria." This setting is so "over the top," so schmaltzy and pop-oriented as to kill any of the haunting depth of feeling this miniature masterwork generally elicits.

Choruses complement the orchestras on a couple of tracks, the CD ending with a normal, sung version of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" (well sung by the University of Maryland Chorus and [Washington] Cathedral Choral Society).

Despite the schmucked up Schubert, this is an enjoyable, lighthearted "seasonal" recording.

Other recordings in the series may be worth a try too, depending on one's taste. There are two volumes of "carols for keyboards"; two of carols for orchestra and chorus; one of carols for solo piano; one for sax and keyboards; one of "pop and traditional carols for vocalists"; and one other of carols for symphonic orchestra.

This series provides a good way to enhance your Christmas recording collection with a large variety of music by an almost equally large group of quality performers at a cost that won't put you in the poor house.

Nutrition for the 'right brain'

The Mozart Effect

Music for Children

Compiled by Don Campbell. The Children's Group, Inc., 1400 Bayly St., Suite 7, Pickering, ON L1W 3R4. Three CD set; CDs also available individually. Also available from Spring Hill Music, 1-800-427-7680; or the set may be ordered from amazon.com for $37.98 (US)(list price: $52.98).

Musician/teacher/author Don Campbell is making a career out of championing Mozart for children. He founded the Institute for Music, Health and Education and has a book with the same name as this three CD set; the CDs, of course, exemplify and augment the book.

Says Campbell: "Mozart has a simple yet remarkable way of being clear, organized and efficient while not overly emotional. His music enters the brain in ways that are subtle yet powerful....

"Research shows that listening to Mozart's music assists our spatial intelligence, improving our abilities to organize visual information. Some of his music is nutrition for the right (or creative) brain. It creates a magical, architectural place that isn,'t cluttered and where both mind and body feel safe and free."

Mozart for every mood

Campbell chooses Mozart of differing moods for each of the three CDs: the music on Volume 1, subtitled "Tune Up Your Mind," was "specially selected to improve intelligence and increase IQ." Some of its contents are the rondo from the ubiquitous *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*; movements from the 2nd and 5th violin concertos and Symphony No. 17; and the variations on the French folk tune which North American kids know as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

A more subdued Volume 2 is subtitled "Relax, Daydream & Draw." It contains slow movements from two symphonies (Nos. 6 and 18), two serenades (Nos. 9 and 10), the bassoon concerto, a divertimento, a cassation, and an instrumental version of an aria from *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Volume 3 is subtitled "Mozart in Motion," which describes the prevailing energetic mood. It features, among others, the "Champagne Aria," and "Papageno's Song" from *The Magic Flute*; Symphony No. 40; more serenade music.

The performers are such illustrious groups as the Salzburg Chamber Orchestra, Vienna Mozart Academy, the Cambridge Buskers and some lesser known lights.

Either Campbell's volumes or John Stone's *Baby Needs Mozart* (see next page) will be sure to please — and enlighten by mentally stimulating — virtually any child on your Christmas list. And don' forget the adults!

'Amazing wonder drug boosts brain power'...

Baby Needs Mozart

Delos International, Inc., 1998. 1645 North Vine Street, Suite 340, Hollywood, CA 90028. $15.99 (US). Playing time: 70:44. (Website:www.delosmus.com).

This is another recording touting the benefits of Mozart, and, by extension, composers of similar ilk, though some would say "the divine Mozart" has no peers.

This recording does that touting so compellingly, and the selections here are so delicious, that you will barely notice that you just paid $16 or $20 for an album of individual Mozart movements some of which (if you already know the joys of Amadeus) you may heretofore have bought as part of their complete symphonies, concertos, sonatas or divertimenti.

John Stone, MD, a professor of cardiology at Emory University School of Medicine, and a poet too, we're told, has selected this winsome collection of Mozart slow movements in which the timbre of the flute, clarinet, muted strings, and piano in its quieter incarnation, predominate.

The performances are by top-notch groups and soloists such as the Shanghai Quartet, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Anthony Newman, Eugenia Zukerman, Jean Pierre Rampal, etc. Informative liner notes create, in a few sentences, a context for each movement.

Brain food

This is soothing music indeed. But, unbeknownst to you (or the unsuspecting rambunctious infant or infants you corralled for quiet time), this soothing music is working wonders in and on your brain even as it calms and pampers and pacifies you and your offspring (or students).

Here's what the good doctor Stone says: "Before birth, the infant's world is rhythm and sound; the thump and roar of the mother heart, to which the infant kicks, flips, and dances in the dark. With such early prompting, no wonder we humans revel in music.

"What joy, then, after birth, to learn that such a dance can continue, courtesy of maestro Mozart. And how reassuring to parents to know that hearing such wondrous music just might boost brain development in their spirited little acrobats."

As I'm writing this review I'm re-listening, and I can testify (as my parents intuitively knew) that baby isn't the only one who needs Mozart.

You know, maybe somebody should compare the effects of Mozart with the effects of that much-touted relaxing herb St. John's wort. Now *there's* a research project! I'd surely participate if they'd ask; if they'd call when I'm not listening to Mozart....

A faith-ful feast

Haydn masses

Missa Sanctae Caeciliae; Nikolaimesse; Missa brevis; Grosse Orgelmesse

The Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. The Academy of Ancient Music, Simon Preston, conductor/organist.

L' Oiseau-Lyre/Decca 455 712-2. Two CD set (148:54).

This is the only recording reviewed here that is not a recent release. Each mass was recorded at a different time from 1978 to 1980, with this compilation of those performances having been released in 1997. Both the timelessness of Haydn's music and of these performances make the CD well worth calling to attention. In any case, revisiting older recordings is common in the classical music world: they, and the music, endure.

If musical settings of the Mass would seem to be foreign territory to Reformed folks, in reality nothing in these glorious choral works by Haydn (1732-1809) will be alien to the ears or even the theological minds and hearts of such listeners.

That is true even though two of these masses were written by the devout Haydn *in honorem Beatissimae Virginis Mariae,* in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And that's because textually, a mass is a mass is a mass: for centuries the mass text has remained constant, consisting of six parts, all of which are thoroughly biblical expressions of the universal Christian faith. At the same time, that text allows for an intensely personal profession of the faith.

Confessing one Lord

While the Latin text may seem off-putting to the uninitiated, it allows Christians anywhere and everywhere to both enjoy the universal appeal of the music and, regardless of their own language, to profess together in *one* language their "undoubted Christian faith." (It's also fascinating to pick out the numerous words and phrases that are recognizable in English.)

The six mass parts are:

Kyrie: the penitent sinner prays, with the publican, "Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy."

Gloria: a prayer of both praise and penitence: "Glory to God in the highest...; We praise thee, we bless thee, we adore thee, we glorify thee.... O Lord Jesus Christ ... who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us; ... receive our prayer....

Credo: literally "I believe...," a profession of faith as embodied in the Nicene Creed.

Sanctus: the awed prayer of the saints and angels in Revelation: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Hosanna in the highest."

Benedictus: the words of the Palm Sunday crowd as Jesus rides into Jerusalem: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." +

Agnus Dei: a logical conclusion from the previous, a reference to Christ as suffering Savior — "Lamb of God," — again in the form of a threefold prayer by the penitent sinner, echoing the beginning *Kyrie*: "Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world have mercy on us. Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace."

Cream of Haydn's crop

Virtually every important composer of choral music has set the mass (even J.S. Bach, who was a Lutheran, though his monumental *Mass in B Minor* was not meant for liturgical use). Mozart set it many times; so did Haydn. And these four Haydn settings are the cream of his crop. I believe they rival most of Mozart's settings, but that's another article.

These masses would never have been intended to be listened to one after the other, as a recording invites one to do. But they are different enough, and Haydn is inventive enough, that one can easily do so without becoming bored.

The greatest work of the four is the not-so-well-known St. Cecilia Mass (not written in honor of Cecilia, the patron saint of music, but named so because it was probably performed by the Cecilia Brotherhood in Vienna).

This work contains a handful of exuberant, imaginative fugues, lovely homophonic sections (hymn-like four-part harmony), compelling arias for soloists as well as for enterprising combinations of singers.

The Academy of Ancient Music, the British "period-" or "original-instrument" orchestra featured here was in its relatively early days when these masses were recorded. Yet there's nothing here of the excessively mannered approach that characterized some of the early period-instrument groups (there are now dozens).

Warmth and clarity

The "authentic" bowed instruments (or modern copies) yield what might be characterized as the thin but warm buzz typical of instruments with gut strings (instead of 20th century steel), increasing the clarity of texture. The 18th century oboes and trumpets — the latter *de rigeur* in festive movements — are also appropriately less edgy-sounding than their modern counterparts.

The use of boy choristers (as opposed to female sopranos and altos) also enhances clarity of line and texture, imparts an ethereal quality, and is of course the way Haydn would have performed his own work.

The soloists — sopranos Judith Nelson and the incomparable Emma Kirkby, contraltos Shirley Minty, Carolyn Watkinson and Margaret Cable, tenors Rogers Covey Crump and Martyn Hill, and bass David Thomas are first-tier, now all well-known specialists in pre-19th century music. There's one particularly arduous bass aria in the *St. Cecilia Mass* which contains running passages with great octave-and-a-half leaps from top to bottom of a bass' range. Thomas makes it sound easy, and is likely to bring an appreciative smile to the face of the listener in the process.

The Academy of Ancient Music, normally conducted by Christopher Hogwood, is here led by organist Simon Preston, who is featured in the Orgelmesse (organ mass). Preston is particularly good at pre-19th century works (I recommend his recordings of Handel's organ concertos), and he does a fine, straightforward job here, both as organist and conductor.

These four exceptional choral works in these fine performances will yield two-and-a-half hours of joyous listening.

An immigrant family's Christmas

Jacoba Bos

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOUG ROORDA

"Well, it looks like we ain't gonna get home before dark," Murray Douglas said as he shifted his old car into second gear, his big work hand tightly gripping the black knob topping the iron stickshift. "And this bloomin' windshield keeps foggin' up; I can't see a doggone thing." He turned his head towards the backseat. "Martha, hand me the rag."

The farmer's wife quickly reached for a grimy cloth from the assortment of groceries and junk surrounding her. A baby, snugly wrapped in a gray blanket, was sleeping soundly on a bag of flour on the car floor. Martha found a lump of salt, wrapped it in the cloth and handed it to her husband who vigorously attacked the frost-covered windshield with it. His efforts were rewarded with a square foot of foggy glass through which the bleak countryside became visible. Mailboxes lining the rutted side road attested to the presence of people living in farm homes at the end of long laneways.

"Here, boy, you wanna make yourself a hole so you can see?" The farmer handed the salt pouch to the boy in the passenger seat. "You have cold weather in Holland too, John?" the farmer asked, raising his voice as if the Dutch immigrant boy would understand the English language better if it was shouted.

"Yah, we have cold in Holland," John said haltingly as his cold hands rubbed the car's windshield. He blew on the glass to get a closer view of the road home. He handed the salt pouch to Martha and put his hands deep in the pockets of his Sunday jacket, which his mother had cleverly constructed from an old coat. He felt the icy wind blowing around his ankles in the drafty car.

The baby whimpered in her sleep. Martha hushed her gently, then took her in her arms and began to sing softly to her. John recognized the familiar tune of *Silent Night*.

"You have Christmas in Holland too? And Santa Claus and all that useless stuff?" Murray shouted at John over the roar of the motor. The baby awoke with a startling cry.

"Why don't you just feed her, instead of giving her those silly songs," Murray grumbled.

His wife quietly unbuttoned her wintercoat and dress and nursed her daughter.

"So tell me John," Martha said, taking up the conversation where her husband left off: "How do you celebrate Christmas?" Then realizing that "celebrate" was as yet an unknown word to their young hired hand, she clarified it with: "What would you do at Christmas if you were in Holland now?"

John felt the lump in his throat growing. He swallowed hard as he thought about his family's last Christmas in the Netherlands with all his aunts and uncles crowded together in their small living room.

He remembered how Opa had stood up and said a prayer in the middle of the evening when his mom was about to pour a second cup of coffee. Uncle Henk had quickly put his freshly lit cigar in the ashtray as Opa reverently interceded for his daughter, Jannie, and son-in-law, Piet, and their children, mentioning everyone by name; from John, the oldest, and the twins, Tineke and Mieke, who were allowed to stay up late, and little Peter who was asleep in his crib upstairs, unaware of the life-changing adventure the family would embark on in the New Year.

"Lord, make these first emigrants like Abraham. Make them to be a blessing in the strange country," Opa had said. Then the prayer had come to an abrupt end without the usual "For Jesus Sake." The barely audible "Amen" was followed by a cacophony of nose blowing.

Then they had all gathered around the organ. His mother had played, and they all had sung "*Ere zij God*" and all the songs they knew by heart, till Uncle Henk had said that they should let the neighbors get some sleep.

John was grateful for the growing darkness enveloping the foursome as he struggled to regain his composure. "Well, yah ... at Christmas we have a tree with candles and cookies on a string ... and we go to church ... and my grandpa and grandma

come over...." His voice trailed off leaving small steam clouds hanging in the frigid confines of the old vehicle.

"And do you give presents too?" Martha's friendly question required an answer. John took a deep breath. "No, we get that when Sinterklaas comes," he said.

"Sin-ter-klaas" Martha sounded out the word. "Oh, you mean Santa Claus, but he comes at Christmas."

"Oh, no" John said earnestly. He comes on Sinterklaas Day, on five December."

"Wouldn't you know it," Murray bellowed. "Leave it to the Dutch to change even Santa Claus himself. You better look out boy cause if the old fella finds out he's liable to send ya all walking back to your old country in yer wooden shoes." He slapped his thigh in glee.

"So did you get any presents on December 5?" Martha asked when her husband's attention had returned to the wintry road ahead.

"Well, no," John said haltingly. "This year we not have much money... so ...I just give my mom a present.

"Really? That's nice of you. What did you buy for her, or d'you want to keep it a secret?" Then realizing the difficult word, she added: "You alone know it, right?"

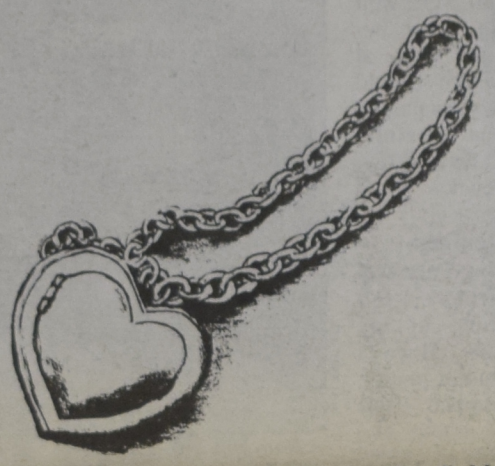
"Yah," John said, relieved at the thought of not having to tell his boss' wife about the silver locket in the blue velvet box in his pants pocket, safely tucked away between his jackknife and a clean hankie.

"You must buy yourself warm mittens and hat when you go to town with the boss and his wife," John's mother had said to him when he left that morning. "These knitted hats are not for this country. You should get a leather hat with flaps over your ears, like the neighbor boy wears," she added as she tied a scarf around her head, tucking in blonde strands of her long hair, before starting out on the icy path to the outhouse standing among the naked branches of the lilac bush.

John caressed the small parcel in his pocket. "Your mom can put two pictures in here," the saleslady had said as she had gently opened the delicate locket. "See, maybe pictures from your grandpa and grandma. They live in Canada?" She enunciated each word carefully.

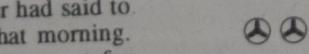
"Are they in Holland?" she questioned further.

"Yah, they are in Holland," John said. "And my mom maybe not see them, never," he blurted out, remembering Oma's words when their whole family stood at the Rotterdam harbor, surrounded by scores of emigrants dressed in their Sunday best, waiting to board the huge ship that would bring them to the new country.



"Och, kind," Oma had said as she hugged her daughter, "Maybe I'll never see you again."

"Then this will be a wonderful gift for your mother," the saleslady said, as she held the silver locket in her soft white hands, turning it so it could catch the colorful glow of lights coming from a small Christmas tree on the shiny glass counter. "Yah," John said "I take that," counting out ten two-dollar bills for his purchase.



"Looks like you've got company at your house," Murray said as he peered through the partly defrosted windshield, skillfully manoeuvring his old Model A Ford down the narrow, tree-lined lane that led to the immigrant family's home.

"That must be a 1940 Ford," he said, as they came closer to the house. "The guy who can afford to drive a car like that shore ain't no farmer," he concluded as he brought his vehicle to a stop beside the sleek model parked in front of the clapboard house. A coal oil lamp in the window spread a soft glow over the path leading to the back door of the lean-to. John had helped his dad with building the lean-to from the large wooden crate that had served as a container for their belongings as they travelled across the ocean. The name Piet Jansen was still visible over the door.

"Thank you for the ride," John said as he stepped off the high running board into the snow. "Yeah, Merry Christmas," Murray shouted over the noise of the grinding gearshift.

"Say hello to your family from us," Martha called from the backseat, but John was already in the lean-to where he took off his jacket and wet shoes. The smell of soup and coffee welcomed him as he stepped into the warm kitchen.

"Shake hands with the Dominee," his mother prompted him. John obediently placed his cold hand in the firm hand of the gray-haired gentleman.

"You're becoming a fine young man, John," the pastor said. "Your pa was just telling me that you worked like a man alongside him on Murray Douglas's farm this summer. Your parents can sure be proud of you," John blushed, at a loss for words, though the pastor understood and spoke Dutch.

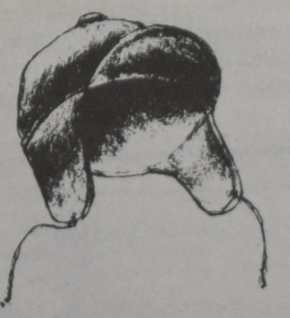
"I also talked to your parents about catechism," the pastor continued. "I'll pick you up on Tuesday evening at seven. We'll have our weekly lesson in Smit's living room — the same place where we have our church services." He quickly drank the last of his coffee and stood up. "I must go now, for I'd like to visit the Pietersen family yet. Mrs. Pietersen is not well and her husband is out of work. It's not easy for them." He bent down to put on his galoshes which had been kept warm under the large cookstove.

He shook hands again, and, guided by the light of his flashlight, made his way to his car, which sprang to life with a push of the shiny starter on the gleaming dashboard.

"John, you know what the Dominee told us?" mother said excitedly as the door closed behind the pastor. "He's going to get us an organ, a real organ, just like we had in Holland. Oh, I can't wait." Her hand stroked imaginary organ keys on the checkered oilcloth which covered the table, and she sang softly to her own inaudable accompaniment.

"And you know something," she continued: "It won't cost us a penny, because the Dominee got it from an old couple who wanted to give it to a family with children. So I guess we qualify." She gave her husband a playful kiss on the cheek. "But now we'd better have supper before this soup will burn." She lifted the pan off the stove and put it in the centre of the table. "Tineke and Mieke will you set the table?" She lifted little Peter into his high chair and tied a bib around his uncooperative neck.

"What's in this big box, Ma?" Mieke asked as she reached for the plates in the cupboard.



"What box?" Mother eyed her daughter quizzically, but before Mieke could answer her father said, "Oh yah, I found that box in the lean-to when I came in from doing chores. It says on there that it's for an immigrant family, so I guess we qualify, right?"

He winked at his wife and with an impish grin put the box on an empty chair in the circle of light coming from the coal oil lamp hanging above the table. "I think that maybe the Dominee brought this," he said as his jackknife slid through the heavy tape sealing the box.

"Oh, here's a card, let's see what it says before we go through the stuff." He took the card out of the envelope and read slowly: "May the peace of the Christ Child stay with you in the New Year."

"But who's it from?" Jannie inquired as she took her impatient youngest son from the confines of his high chair. "It's signed: From a family in faith in America," Piet Jansen read slowly, holding the brightly decorated card close to the light, while his daughter's eager hands rummaged through the contents of the box.

"Look, Ma, a hat like the neighbor boy has. See it has flaps and fur and it's leather." She pulled the large hat over her ears much to the delight of her little brother who laughed out loud.

"Oh John," Mother suddenly remembered: "You were going to buy a hat like that in town today, did you get one?"

"No," John said simply, but I bought something for you." He reached into his pocket and placed the parcel in her hand.

"Here Piet, hold your son for a minute while I open this," Jannie said. She placed little Peter into her husband's arms. She hugged her oldest son, then carefully untied the ribbon, rolling it up into a neat ball. She opened the small box expectantly. "Oh, my boy," she sighed, overcome with emotion. "It's so beautiful."

"Now you can have Opa and Oma close by," John said softly as his mother gingerly opened the locket.

"Let's see if it fits," Piet said, as he placed the necklace around his wife's shapely neck. "Fit for a queen," he said. "Good choice, son." John smiled quietly.

Piet picked up his youngest son from the floor and put him in his high chair with a new toy truck from the box. "Now, let's eat." It was Tineke's turn to pray at suppertime. She thanked God for John's hat with flaps, for her and Mieke's new dresses, for Pa's new socks and for Opa and Oma who were now closer to Ma, and for all the things they found in the box.

"And thank you for the old people who are going to give us their organ," she added. "And maybe they can come over and sing *'Ere zij God'* with us."

Jacoba Bos is a freelance writer who lives in Strathroy, Ont. Doug Roorda, who illustrated this story, is based in St. Catharines, Ont.

Consumer trance

John Krueger

I've always felt uneasy about Christmas shopping, and even more so after Tony Campolo described the greed which fuels capitalism. "It's a system that flourishes by convincing people who have everything they need to buy what they don't need in ever larger quantities." He said Christmas shopping illustrates this truth. We find shopping for others so pressured because our family and friends either don't need or already have most of what we see in the stores.

There was nothing subtle about Bourbon Street, but something still bothered me about the spectacle.

My reluctance to charge out to the mall grew even more after an experience I had this summer in a most unlikely place: the infamous Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

Some colleagues and I went there for a conference, and in our time off followed the flow of tourists to this sizzling street in the city's French Quarter. We watched people saunter down the middle of Bourbon Street, swigging a beer or Louisiana Hurricane, and tip their hats to the cops without fear of being arrested. And we saw street hustlers who specialized in shock treatment. One guy held a live six foot snake above his head. For a few bucks he would drape it around your shoulders and snap your picture as you posed with the serpent in front of the "Temptations" strip club. I declined.

We listened to some fine jazz in the Louis Armstrong tradition, and watched a blues man ring the neck of his guitar as it whined, "The Thrill is Gone." The Saturday night crowd all but swept us along the street, then the stream of carousers suddenly parted like water around a rock. A man had planted himself in the middle of the street and clutched an eight foot rough hewed cross. He eyed us with grim sincerity as we scooted around him. Prison and biker chaplains will tell you that the remedy should be made as blatant as the sin. There was nothing subtle about Bourbon Street, but something still bothered me about the spectacle.

Then my nagging feeling elbowed its way to the surface. I remembered the other street I strolled along that day. Actually, it was the prestigious River Walk mall which stretches for a quarter mile along the Mississippi. A huge stylized Mardi Gras character in red and green striped tights with dangling beads and wing-tipped feathered mask welcomed us to the hundreds of stores. In keeping with the masquerade theme, the essential facts — the operating values — of the mall were well hidden. You couldn't peer behind a thin veil and gasp at children from a Third World sweat shop stitching your pair of jeans. So patrons gleefully stood in line and handed the store clerk their 50 bucks.

Strumming of desires

As I oohed and awed my way along the glitzy corridors, I felt a constant strumming of my desires, so that the things I wanted became a kind of prayer, a longing that wrapped itself around the clothes, books and paintings. The grip of greed slowly tightened and squeezed the life out of my affection for God, my desire for justice and concern for the poor.

Such values are especially eclipsed by the "big ticket item." Draw your face close enough to a sporty new Lexus or "home theatre" and the moral horizon is blocked out all together. It makes me wonder. Are there demons disguised as angels of light who decreed, "Let there be neon," and we ended up with bright new shopping malls? Or is materialism just an addiction which narrows our focus to the trivia of the next purchase? I don't know. But as I strolled through the mall, the muzak soothed and swept through my head until I shook off the consumer trance.

A Bourbon Street scene.

At least on Bourbon Street you could see what was going on. It was as blatant as the silhouetted stripper making serpentine moves behind a silk drape, poised to lure patrons off the street. The hustler with his snake and the Christian with his cross laid claim to the territory. The powers and principalities were marking the battle lines. I almost felt secure in the clarity of it all. What you saw was what you got. Here, few people pretended to be virtuous.

As I prepare to do a little Christmas shopping, I know I'll never see an eight-foot cross in the mall. If anyone lugged the lumber along the polished marble, they'd be whisked away as fast as you could buzz security.

Maybe that's part of the problem, too. There's nothing to jolt us back to reality. Perhaps the anaesthetic of our consumer culture is even more numbing than a few drinks on Bourbon Street.

John Krueger is the career and placement co-ordinator at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ont.

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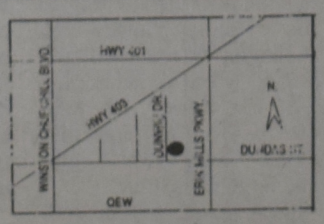

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The survival of a saint:

The long career of St. Nicholas among the Dutch

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

"You should have been there," we say for want of words to describe certain scenes or situations. Such is the case when trying to describe the atmosphere in the Netherlands around the 5th of December.

Several years ago I visited the Netherlands in early December and got caught up in the excitement and hubbub of the "Sinterklaas" (Saint Klaas, i.e., Nicholas) season. But all along I asked myself: How is it that for almost 500 years now, ever since the Reformation, Saint Nicholas has managed to survive, and even thrive among all the Dutch Calvinists, when the feast days of other saints are no longer observed by Protestants?

What makes his survival even more remarkable is that this man is said to come from Spain each year, and if you know the long-standing bitter war the Dutch had with Spain — which for centuries left a bad taste in their collective mouths — it is hard to believe the Dutch would welcome anyone coming from that country.

Though the Netherlands now has a Catholic majority, Saint Nicholas's survival is also a remarkable feat considering he was never formally canonized as a saint, and is no longer listed on the Roman Catholic Church's official saints' calendar. How is it that he managed to thrive not only in his own country but also in most of the world where Dutch people settled?

William Shetter says in his book *The Netherlands in Perspective* that "the central place of Sinterklaas in the consciousness of cultural identity can be seen in the fact that December 5 is the one holiday universally celebrated by Dutch people living abroad, even years after emigration."

Recalling the 'blessed dead'

It is not that city officials and Protestant clergy didn't try to curtail, or even stop, these celebrations. In 1618 the city fathers of Tiel forbade the setting out of shoes into which it was hoped the Saint would stuff presents, and in 1625 Arnhem's city fathers forbade the bakers to bake Sinterklaas cookies. By baking and displaying images of the Saint, said the councillors, the people were displaying heathen idols. Time and again the Reformed clergy railed against the celebration of a Roman Catholic saint by Protestants.

To understand Sinterklaas's curious staying power, we need to look first at the history and making of a saint. From the time of the New Testament apostles until the year AD 311, when Emperor Constantine sanctioned Christianity, there had been widespread persecution of Christians, and many people were martyred for their faith. These martyrs were looked up to as examples of faith, and the word "martyr" came to assume the special meaning of one who physically died for the faith.

CPA/NBT H. VD. LEEDEN

Saint Nicholas's survival is a remarkable feat considering he was never formally canonized as a saint, and is no longer listed on the Roman Catholic Church's official saints' calendar.

Toward the end of this era of martyrs, the names and dates of these saintly dead were written in the church calendar books so that people might remember them and pray for them. The Third Council of Carthage in AD 397 stated: "Let the passions [i.e., sufferings] of the martyrs be read at their anniversary celebrations." The early Christians often celebrated communion at the tombs of these saints, and commemorated their deaths by retelling their stories year after year.

Slowly on, these martyrs took on heroic proportions as tales of their struggles and suffering for the faith took on lives of their own. And, as over time the stories of these saints became more widespread, praying by the living for the dead evolved into the praying to the dead on behalf of the living.

Distinction between veneration and worship

At the same time that Christianity became the standard religion, people had to abandon their previous heathen gods, e.g. the god of fertility, the god of the harvest, the sailors' god. To fill the void they began to look to the "saints" for special protection. Although the church at first fought against this practice, Jerome defended it by making a distinction between veneration of the saints and worship of God, a distinction still made by the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

It was in this era that Nicholas was born as the only child of well-to-do-parents who had long prayed for a child. Legend has it that he was so spiritually precocious as a child, he would not nurse on fasting days. As a young lad he assisted in the church, and in his youth he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Shortly upon his return, he became Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor. As a bishop he spent many years in prison under Emperor Diocletian, but was released when Constantine became emperor.

At first, the sailors' saint

Though in the strictest sense Nicholas had not suffered a martyr's death, his death date, December 6, circa AD 350, was added to the church's calendar, and soon a cult sprang up around him. (December 6 is not the anniversary of his birth as many believe, but the anniversary of his death.) .

When the temple of the maritime goddess Artemis, in Myra, was destroyed by Christians, the sailors, who in an era before any navigational aids were invented, daily faced the unpredictable dangers of wind and sea, looked for a new protector. They found one in Saint Nicholas, who was said to have saved sailors while he was still alive. The sailors came to worship at the church in Myra which had been dedicated to St. Nicholas, and carried icons of him with them on their journeys.

After Nicholas' death many legends sprouted up about him, totaling some 20 in all. The most enduring and endearing, however, the one on which we base our gift giving, is the one in which he saves three maidens from being sold into slavery or prostitution by providing a dowry for them.

By the 12th century, Nicholas' popularity was at its peak — right behind Jesus and the Virgin Mary in frequency and intensity of veneration. From Greece, the Saint Nicholas cult spread throughout the world. In 1087, Italian merchants stole his remains at Myra bringing them to Bari in Italy. From there the Crusaders brought the veneration of St. Nicholas to northern Europe. Bari, situated on the Adriatic Sea coast of Italy, was the port through which all European Crusaders traveled when going to and returning from the Holy Land. It may be safely assumed that these pilgrims stopped to worship at the shrine of St. Nicholas both coming and going.

At one time Bari was under Spanish rule and the early historians may have mistaken Spain for Italy, thus having Sinterklaas come from Spain. Others claim that because Dutch ships ruled the waves in the Middle Ages, bringing all kinds of luxuries from Spanish ports, it was only natural, as well, to have Sinterklaas come by boat bringing gifts from Spain.

Every day a saint's day

Up until almost 1600, all of Europe, including the Netherlands, belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. Every day, Mass was said and dedicated to that day's particular saint. The common people did not have calendars telling them what day it was, but most people kept track of which day it was according to which saint they were honoring. Saints were an integral part of everyday life.

People also named their children after saints, hoping the child would emulate all the good qualities of his or her particular namesake. Children born on a particular saint's day were often named after that saint — allowing them to remember on which day their birthday fell.

Many Dutch names have their roots in saints' names. For example, Trijntje is a shortened version of Catharijna, for St. Catherine; and Klaas, of course, is a shortened form of Nicolaas. Naming children after saints forged close links with those saints.

Heroes of faith in stories and plays

Up until the Reformation, the churchgoer was spiritually fed on a steady diet of stories of the saints, thereby assuring the saints continued veneration. After the Reformation, the Protestant laity were encouraged to read the Bible for themselves, and in so doing put an end to saint veneration. However, the printing presses which provided the Bible to the Protestants also churned out hundreds of stories of the saints, which were popular reading.

In our day, movie and sports stars have become popular cultural heroes — just think of the Elvis Presley cult in which thousands visit his Graceland mansion on the anniversary of his death — but to the people of the Middle Ages, the saints were held up as heroes. And because Protestants as well as Roman Catholics appreciated great acts

of faith, the saints' stories lived on.

Before the Reformation, in the medieval period, there were the morality plays. Travelling groups of actors would play out religious themes at church fairs, or other private functions to audiences who could not read. These plays were the forerunners of our theater.

Often the miraculous stories attributed to the saints were played out so that people were kept educated not only about biblical stories, but about the lives of the saints, and about their lives outside of the church, as well.

These were very popular means of entertainment and well attended. The 20 or so miracles attributed to St. Nicholas made wonderful morality plays and his cult flourished well into the Middle Ages. Besides these traveling morality plays there was also the traveling public. Many people in the Middle Ages, besides the Crusaders, went on pilgrimages and the St. Nicholas shrines were favorite destinations helping to keep his cult alive.

The Reformation did not change peoples' customs and beliefs overnight. Church fairs continued well after the Reformation and became the famous Kermis bazaars which featured booths and stalls with magicians and games of chance.

On the 6th of December many of the seaports with churches dedicated to St. Nicholas held St Nicholas fairs. Protestants as well as Catholics attended these fairs, and this practice lasted well into the 18th century. However, as Protestants became more and more educated in the Reformed faith, the only saint who survived in their culture was St. Nicholas. Why?

An everyday Christian

First, there was the man himself — unlike other saints who had healing or mystical powers and belonged in the church, Nicholas was the patron saint of seafarers, merchants, marriageable young women, the falsely accused, the endangered traveler and farmers — the everyday kind of people.

He was not a great scholar whose work had to be studied, or a great mystic or hermit whose life could not easily be emulated. He was a real man who acted his faith, what we would call a "hands-on" kind of saint, a man the common people could identify with.

Protestants did not see him so much as a Catholic saint but as a friend for all the people, almost more outside the church than in.

The Dutch were a nation of seafarers, and both Roman Catholics and Protestants could appreciate a saint who saved sailors from shipwreck. Dutch seaport churches, like those in Amsterdam, Kampen, Harderwijk, Edam, Monnikendam, as well as those in the Hanseatic ports with which the Dutch traded, were dedicated to St. Nicholas. And as already noted, being the patron saint of sailors may also have aided in developing the tradition of coming by boat from Spain.

The Feast of St. Nicholas — *oil on canvas painting by Jan Steen.*

Family oriented

Secondly, The Dutch were, and still are, extremely family-oriented. Paul Zumthor writes in his book *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*: "Children were adored and spoilt and lived under conditions of almost total liberty."

In a country that loves to celebrate birthdays and other family occasions, a celebration such as Sinterklaas was a perfect outlet by which parents could spoil their children.

When the Reformed clergy preached against the custom, the celebration went indoors, if not underground. The Dutch have always felt they have a right to do whatever they want to in their own homes, and even church authorities were — and are — hard pressed to tell them different.

The fact that the Dutch celebrate Sinterklaas in a very intimate family setting is reflected in Jan Steen's famous painting of St. Nicholas Eve, in which we see a Dutch family celebrating Sinterklaas evening. In the painting, the family is central and St. Nicholas is not even visible.

Closely connected to this is the Dutch love for *gezelligheid* — a kind of homey coziness. There is not a more *gezellige* evening in the year than Sinterklaas evening in the Netherlands. Dusk steals in somewhere around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and by 5 o'clock, all is dark. The wind rustles through the bare tree branches, while overhead a full moon peeks in and out of scudding clouds.

Outside, it is dark and spooky, but inside all is cozy and ... *gezellig!* One could call Sinterklaas the patron saint of *gezelligheid*.

An excuse for spending

Thirdly, the Dutch, especially during the 17th century, the years immediately after the Reformation, were a wealthy people who could afford to give gifts. Although at first gifts consisted mainly of sweets put in the children's wooden shoes, those evolved into more substantial gifts, such as money and toys.

In spite of their purchase power, however, the Dutch people's natural frugality did not allow them to just spend willy-nilly, and the celebration of Sinterklaas became the good excuse they needed to spend money by lavishing gifts on each other.

And for every Dutchman wanting to buy something, there were 10 willing to sell that something. The Dutch were, and still are, astute merchandisers who perceive great opportunity in the Sinterklaas celebration to sell their goods. Special cookies and candies associated with Sinterklaas arrive in well-stocked stores, well in advance of December 5, to make sure every boy and girl will find some in his or her wooden shoe. Merchants certainly share in the survival of this saint.

Although Saint Nicholas had great religious significance historically, he is no longer perceived by the Dutch as a religious being, but viewed more as a tradition devoid of religious overtones — rather like his North American counterpart and namesake Santa Claus.

Just as there was a subtle shift in the early history of the church of praying *for* the saints to praying *to* the saints, so there has been, over the years, a subtle shift in celebrating St. Nicholas the person, to Sinterklaas the tradition.

The Dutch who still practise their faith like it that way, keeping the materialistic part of gift-giving well away from the actual Christmas celebration on the 25th of December. And in doing so, Sinterklaas, by deflecting the materialistic aspect of Christmas, may play his greatest role yet in our time, namely keeping the 25th of December a holy day.

It is a tradition worth emulating.

Janet Sjaarda Sheers loves to write historical fiction and non-fiction, and has a special interest in her Dutch heritage. She lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

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Samuel's voice

On little Sam's fourth birthday we took him bowling with grandpa and grandma and all of his cousins and uncles and aunts. There was quite a crowd, and when everyone had settled in to enjoy the game, a sonorous voice came booming over the public address system, "Happy Birthday to Sam, who is four today!"

Everyone broke into wild cheering, except Sam, who stared with bewildered eyes up at the ceiling. Then suddenly he started clapping too. "Daddy," he cried, "God said Happy Birthday to me."

Told by Sam's father, Andrew Geisterfer of Edmonton, Alta.

Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year

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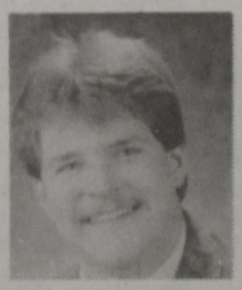
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Ladidi's homecoming

Meredith Dykstra.

"Cu-Culu-Cuuu!" The roosters called out their morning greeting. The sun welcomed the new day extending beams of golden light. As the birds began to usher in the morn with their choruses of praise, Ladidi bounded out of bed, eager not to waste a single moment. She could not help but begin singing: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Her hands began clapping and her body began dancing as she, too, responded to the unfolding of the dawn.

There was a shortage of gasoline, but there certainly wasn't a shortage of people trying to return to their village homes for Christmas.

The brightness of Ladidi's morning was clouded neither by the Sahara dust that hung in the air nor the temperatures that brought out her one and only sweater. Today was the day she was going to return to her village! The thought made her clap and dance with more fervor than ever. Her voice rose louder and louder as she imagined joining the choir of voices that would fill her father's church. Oh, to be one with her family again — both her blood family and her Christian family!

For six months Ladidi had been living at a missionary children's school, far away from Mother and Father while they told the people of the village about Jesus. The school was a busy place with 50 children learning in the two classrooms and sleeping in small rooms just a few steps away. Ladidi was very thankful that she could come and learn, but today she was even more thankful that she was going home!

Ladidi's happiness bubbled inside her all through the day. She beamed a smile as her father arrived from his meeting to make the journey with her. She sang as she walked to the motor park to find transportation. There was a shortage of gasoline, but there certainly wasn't a shortage of people trying to return to their village homes for Christmas.

Even as Ladidi sat sweaty and squished in the bus, her heart danced as she caught glimpses of familiar places through the dirty windows. "Soon. Soon we will arrive," she thought, and her legs wanted to dance. But the cramped seating made that impossible.

Ladidi's legs ached to stretch, and finally they were released as it was time to move through the mass of people to the front of the bus. Though not quite home yet, the village was now within walking distance. Ahhh! Her body was free to move and her spirit allowed to sing. And sing she did — all the way to the grass huts that marked the entrance to her village.

She could see the villagers busy with their work, but all that was put aside. Work could wait — the pastor and his daughter had returned safely from their travels. Ladidi laughed as some smaller children ran up to her and cried out: "Ladidi! Ladidi!" But one small face captured Ladidi's attention: her baby brother. He had changed so much, she thought, as she held him closely in her arms. He had grown!

Ladidi giggled as she shifted the baby onto her back. She tied a piece of material around the youngster and herself to hold him in place, a common way of carrying babies in her village. Yes, life was nearly perfect. Baby Malachi was snugly strapped behind her, and Mother was coming, ready to welcome her home.

The night air was filled with excited voices as the family gathered around the communal calabash bowl. This wooden, etched bowl had held many meals before and the pounded yam inside was not any different than any other night. The meal was made special because everyone was home and all hands reached in to share the food. There were many conversations going on at once. Ladidi tried listening to them all while answering the questions asked of her.

Yes, the special program at the missionary children's school had gone well, Ladidi informed them. She had been given the role of an angel. Her auntie joked that it was fitting for Ladidi did like to sing! "Did this angel dance too?" Auntie asked, her voice teasing.

Roosters awakened Ladidi here in the village just as they did back at the hostel. In fact, she almost forgot where she was. But yes, she was at home and Baby Malachi was fussing for something to eat.

MEREDITH DYKSTRA

Ladidi laughed as some smaller children ran up to her and cried out: "Ladidi! Ladidi!"

The men were discussing the cow that had been bought by the church community for the Christmas feast. Since tomorrow was the day before Christmas, the cow would be killed and the meat prepared for cooking. Ladidi's mouth watered at the thought of eating cow meat. So often, food was scarce as the school struggled to feed the many children.

Ladidi wasn't complaining. The Lord had been good. So often a meal was miraculously provided when it seemed there would be nothing. But still, the thought of receiving some meat was a real blessing. It was with this thought that Ladidi's eyes grew heavy. She lay down on the ground where she could still hear the talking going on around her. The warmth of the familiar voices blanketed her and it was not long before sleep claimed the young traveler.

Many children had started gathering firewood and Ladidi also got to work. She lifted the water pail to her head and started off to help fill the cooking pots. She would have to make more than one trip to the stream today. Piles of rice and beans lay ready to be cooked for the celebration. Later she would also take a trip down to the stream to wash herself so that she would be ready to put on her new clothes.

Mama had worked hard weaving baskets and mats to earn the money needed to buy Christmas clothes this year. Her new skirt and blouse! She could just picture herself singing and dancing with her Mama's choir during the special service tonight.

The church service would be full of praise. The service would be *full* of everything. People would be crammed into the small mud building and some would even stand at the windows outdoors. Most Sundays the building could contain its worshippers, but tonight more people would come because after the service there would be food and more singing and dancing! Those things would always invite people.

Ladidi remembered her father's morning prayer: that everyone who came hungry would leave full. Each hungering heart full of Jesus! Then, full of Jesus they would join in the singing and the dancing with the same joy that overflowed out of Ladidi's heart. Ladidi thought for a brief moment about her teasing auntie's comment about the dancing angel. The joy of the Lord made Ladidi's voice sing and her body dance — surely the heavenly angels wanted to do the same!

Ladidi's hands clapped the rhythm that would later be played by the drums. Ladidi's body moved to the beat as she skillfully kept the now full water pail balanced on her head. Ladidi joyfully sang "Glory to God in the highest" as her feet walked the path that would lead back to the family's grass hut. Home.

Meredith Dykstra is a teacher at Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria.

Heaven's gift

Tom Haesche

Christmas was only a few days away and Father McDuffy carefully made his way along the rugged mountain trail. His predecessor had been slain by a grizzly bear on the same path. But danger, hardship and a capricious mother nature had never deterred the old priest from completing a mission.

His ears picked up the sound of a wolf howling. Still, he allowed that human beings had more to fear from themselves than any animal they might encounter.

As he strode along the winding trail on this blustery December afternoon, leading Bess, his packhorse, he wondered if he would reach Chief Lame Buffalo's camp in time to aid an ailing youngster. And, he hoped, be able to return to the fort in time to celebrate the birthday of the Christ Child.

It was customary for the army post surgeon to respond to emergencies. But the doctor himself was ill. So Father McDuffy, having elementary knowledge of medicine, had volunteered to undertake the mercy mission.

His last visit to the Sioux tribe had been three months ago, when he had baptized three elderly squaws. He had considered this a milestone because Bear Claw, the tribal medicine man, persistently tried to discourage his people from attending Bible classes and listening to the Gospel.

The wise, old priest often had to compromise because he was sensitive to the fact that their centuries-old beliefs were so deeply-rooted. He came to learn that the significant difference between the Indian and the Christian was that the Indian came — by divine providence — to know the same God as the Christian. But he knew God only in an abstract way, leaving him prey to wonder and superstition. Through Christ and the Bible, the informed Christian got to know the will of God in the things wherein he had made his will known.

The gray skies seemed even more threatening as he plodded along. If anyone had met him, with his coonskin hat, raggedy fur coat and heavy beard they would have taken him for an old trapper. He had been on the trail for two days and was bone-weary, hungry and anticipating a restful, uninterrupted sleep. Light snow flurries obscured his vision. But not enough to prevent him from seeing the welcome smoke from the tribe's campfires, rising like thin, white feathers into the sky.

Pausing for a moment, he listened to the plaintive call of a mourning dove. And far out, the yelping of a wolf. As he sat down to rest, he thought about the land, how beautiful it was, yet how cruel. The shape of the land was loneliness, cruelty and death. But he had weathered many seasons, battling the elements to bring the Gospel to far-flung tribes. Inside him was a deep, inner strength. And there was an alertness and penetration in his dark eyes that seemed to belie the wrinkled skin and gray hair.

Having rested, Father McDuffy proceeded along the time-worn trail. Now he could hear the cries and shouting of children. He knew the camp was very near. The vast expanse of wilderness fell behind as he hurried down the path to the village. As he came closer, shouting children and barking dogs ran out to greet him. His heart warmed at the sight. A few called out, "Merry Christmas, Father Duffy." They always shortened his name.

Taking some licorice sticks from his pack, he passed them out to eager, outstretched hands. "Now take me to Red Arrow's tepee," he said, after they had quieted down. The cold wind, sharper now, had increased, with snowflakes clinging to his beard and eyebrows.

The children ran noisily back among the tepees to spread the word that "Father Duffy is here." One of them led him to Red Arrow's lodge. Several braves and squaws pressed in around him to extend their greetings. But on the fringe of the group he saw Bear Claw, glaring with hostile eyes, staring without blinking, like a shark, primitive and threatening. Father McDuffy sensed violent emotions held in precarious balance.

The priest harbored no malice for the man. But he felt uncomfortable in his presence; as if he were trespassing. It was like a tug-of-war between them, and he wasn't sure who was winning.

The priest preached the gospel, taught them to read, and never lost his patience despite their difficulty in learning. On the other hand, Bear Claw used scare tactics to keep them from attending Bible classes. The medicine man's intent was to see that they clung to their traditional legends and beliefs.

Father McDuffy had one advantage: He could hold up the Bible and proclaim, "This is the written word, passed down from generation to generation since the birth of Christ. Words that Jesus uttered before and after his crucifixion. He was the founder of the Christianity."

But the Indian had no word, because anything of historical significance was passed from mouth-to-mouth, in the form of folklore and tales around their campfires and tribal council meetings. Father McDuffy often was discouraged and wondered if they truly understood the message he was trying to impart. At times it was difficult for him to believe that they grasped the whole meaning.

Gray Fox, the sick boy's father, was waiting for him outside of his tepee. The buckskin-clad brave greeted him with a warm handshake.

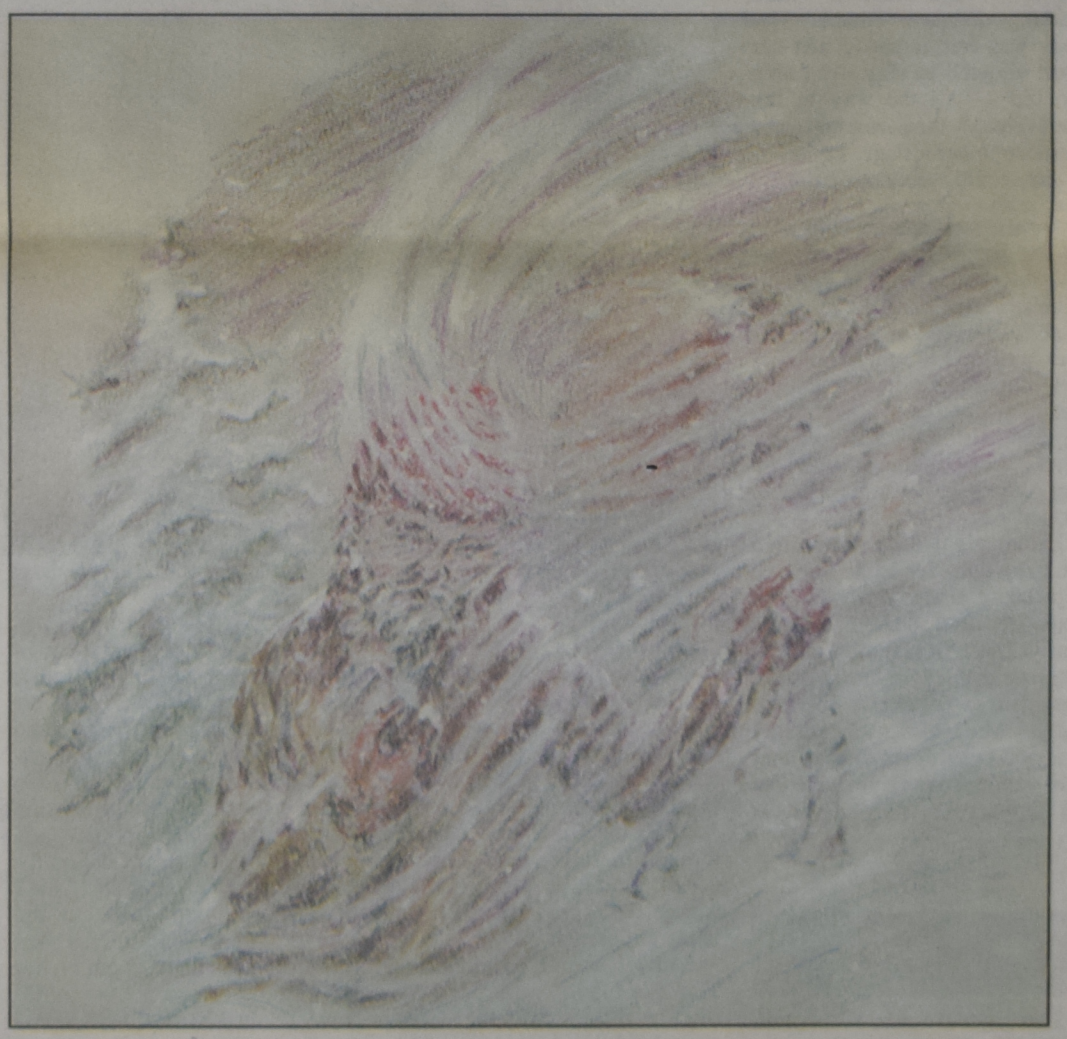
"Welcome, Father Duffy. We are happy to see you again." He smiled. "Red Arrow, my son is very sick. We are glad you come."

Lifting the flap, they went inside. Yellow Moon, the boy's mother, was sitting by the fire. The dim light cast by the flames only partially illuminated the interior. But the priest could see a still form lying under a blanket. Yellow Moon smiled up at Father McDuffy, worry lines adding to her prematurely aged skin.

"Bless you, Father, for coming," she said softly. "Please make powerful medicine for my son. Bear Claw tries but his medicine is weak."

The old priest remained grimly silent as he knelt beside the boy. The young Sioux was breathing rapidly and laboriously, his eyes closed. Father McDuffy had seen enough cases of pneumonia to enable him to recognize the symptoms. And that was what he had to contend with now.

All the chants and incantations that Bear Claw could utter wasn't going to save the lad. Laying his palm on the boy's forehead, he said softly, "Mmm... high fever." He felt of his pulse but remained silent. Having heard from the runner despatched to the fort what the symptoms were, he had come prepared. But it was going to take more than the simple medicine in his pack to make the boy well again. And he somberly accepted the fact that his Christmas would be celebrated — if he could use that word — here in the wilderness; not back



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY DER NEDERLANDEN

at the fort with his friends.

Taking a deep breath, he held it, then expelled it with a deep sigh of resignation. Perhaps if he could reduce the fever, he mused, and get some nourishment into the boy, he might improve in time for McDuffy to make the journey home.

He gave instructions to Gray Fox to tend to Bess and bring his pack to him. Then, he told Yellow Moon that he would need enough wood to keep the fire going all night. But right now he needed warm water to wash off the bear grease that Bear Claw had smeared all over her son's body.

Two hours later, after he had cleansed Red Arrow's skin and wrapped him warmly in blankets, he coaxed the boy to swallow some of the medicine he'd brought with him. Later, if he showed improvement, he would get some warm broth into his belly. But the important thing was to break the fewer.

He urged the parents to get some sleep. But Gray Fox sat with his arms folded and shook his head. Yellow Moon sat in the shadows with her rosary beads, whispering prayers. Weary from his wilderness trek, Father McDuffy had to fight to stay awake. Eventually, the boy's parents drifted off to sleep in a sitting position.

Twice during the night the priest heard a sound outside of the tepee. When he opened the flap and peered out, he saw a figure hurrying off into the darkness. And he knew it was Bear Claw snooping around. Probably listening. Father McDuffy knew that it was an unwritten law that no priest or medicine man should harass another while he was attempting to help those in distress. But in his own case it wasn't a matter of harassment; the parents had sent for him.

During the long vigil the priest managed to get a few ounces of broth into the boy. And it seemed that his fever had lessened. Once, the priest rose and peered outside. The wind velocity had increased and the snow flurries had intensified into a blizzard. Now he was sure that travel would be impossible. Disappointed, he secured the flap and returned to his patient.

There was no dawn, just a lessening of the darkness. Gray clouds appeared almost motionless in the sky. The blizzard was over, but its driving winds had brushed the snow over the foothills, piling it in deep drifts. The storm had thwarted his plans, but there was good news; the boy's fever had broken, and he was asking for something to eat.

Gray Fox gave a hoot of joy. Yellow Moon looked at the priest. A smile lit up her face and Father McDuffy could feel its glow brighten his spirit. He smiled back, reassuringly, both of them knowing that her prayers had more than a little to do with Red Arrow's recovery.

The creeping fatigue of the strenuous journey and the sleepless watch throughout the night had tested the physical endurance of the priest. He now felt a weariness that only a long sleep could cure. But not before Yellow Moon had prepared a steaming bowl of rabbit stew for him. After he'd eaten and made sure that his patient was sound and comfortable, he fell into a deep, satisfying sleep.

When Father McDuffy woke, it was to the comforting sound of Red Arrow's steady, rhythmic breathing. The young brave was asleep, and the priest knew that the crisis was over. They were alone, but the fire still was burning. He had no conception of time, not realizing that he had slept for twelve consecutive hours.

Standing to his feet, he yawned and stretched, wondering where the parents were. Pushing aside the tent flap he peered out into a pristine whiteness. The stars shone with brittle, blue-white sparkles. Stepping out into the snow he filled his lungs with fresh, cold air. He listened to a loon calling from the lake below, and wondered if Christmas had come and gone. He thought about his friends at the fort.

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself, McDuffy," he told himself, swinging his arms against the cold. "You know you'll carry the Good Word to these folks as long as your legs hold out."

The tracks of Yellow Moon and Gray Fox joined with many more, leading to the central lodge. Looking inside the tepee, he made sure his patient was asleep. Then he followed the tracks until he stood near the lodge entrance. It was quiet inside. Curious, he pushed the flap aside and entered a large room. His bushy eyebrows arched in surprise at the sight he beheld.

Unaware of his silent entrance, dozens of braves, squaws and children sat cross-legged on the earthen floor. Most held prayer books and rosary beads. At the far end of the lodge stood a beautiful blue-green Christmas tree, decorated with fancy shells and beads. Father McDuffy stood awestruck, blinking away his tears. In front of the tree stood a crudely fashioned altar covered with a white cloth.

On the altar had been placed a cross fashioned from white birch; and a clay chalice, which he was sure contained elderberry wine. It wasn't until that moment that he realized it was the birthday of the Christ Child.

All conflicting doubts about these so-called savages not understanding the true meaning of Christmas were shattered. His years of effort had not been wasted.

Suddenly, he felt humble, realizing that they were waiting for him to say Mass. They still weren't aware of his presence. Hurrying back to the tepee, he removed his vestments from the pack and donned them. A few minutes later he was back in the lodge. Then, he saw under the Christmas tree a pair of warm, deerskin gloves and a handsome fur coat, which he knew were gifts for him.

Tenting his fingers, he bowed his head and walked slowly down the hard-packed aisle to the altar; knowing that he had received an even greater gift with their presence — a gift from heaven.

Thomas Haesche is a freelance writer who lives in West Haven, Connecticutt.

Christmas in Korea

DIRK SCHOUTEN

Dirk Schouten with two of his students.

Dirk. B. Schouten

Carols playing over loudspeakers. Santa Clauses waving at every corner. Shopping malls full of good cheer, good deals and a lot of good people who just want to get home. Christmas in Toronto? New York? Sorry. Try Christmas in Pusan, South Korea.

If you were to walk in downtown Pusan on a December afternoon you'd be convinced Christmas is celebrated in Korea the same way as it is in the West. Christmas lights are up, prices are down and everyone seems a bit happier than usual.

But this is misleading. While the business world has a definite idea of what Christmas is, Korea as a whole *doesn't*. Christmas is a holiday some people celebrate and others simply ignore.

Why is Christmas treated with such ambiguity? Although the answer is probably as complex as culture itself, it certainly involves religion.

Christianity has never been a major part of Korean culture. Christian holidays, therefore, are not as important as they are in the West. Most non-Christian Koreans appreciate Christmas for its good will rather than its religious significance, and, therefore, the day is treated with a sort of "Do as you please" attitude. Many stores are open for business and schools keep their doors unlocked in case teachers want to come in to catch up on paper work.

So what is "Christmas in Korea"? At least on the secular level, it seems to be a watered-down version of the Western holiday.

Western icons absorbed

A further explanation is that Christmas is not the biggest national holiday here. That's Chu-sok, a three-day celebration in October during which families unite to pay homage to their dead ancestors. In Korean culture, Christianity plays second-fiddle to Buddhism and other Asian religions.

So what is "Christmas in Korea"? At least on the secular level, it seems to be a watered-down version of the Western holiday. In other words, certain cultural icons from the West are taken and absorbed while others are ignored.

For example, red and green become the colors of the month and pop artists release new versions of "Rudolph ee Sasum Konun." People share gifts, eat traditional delicacies, and spend time with their neighbors and friends. However, no huge family get-together takes place and Christmas stress isn't the problem it becomes in the West. No turkey bakes in the oven, no egg-nog gets spiked, and no one tells stories of a fat jolly man who might come through the chimney.

However, there's another side to Christmas in Korea, a side which is not about money concerns or ambiguity. There are millions of Christians here for whom Christ is the centre of attention on December 25. According to some students at the Christian university where I teach, Korean Christians are very active in their churches for the entire month of December. This makes sense, as church life is given high priority among Korean Presbyterians.

A few weeks before Christmas, they will decorate the church lavishly. The Christmas Eve service is a long one. And many people will stay at church until early Christmas morning. Early on Christmas Day, before 4:00 a.m., children go to friends' houses for breakfast and to sing with each other. Then it's back to the church for the days events.

It's easy to point out that Christmas means something completely different in Korea than it does in North America. I'll never forget how casually my Korean neighbors treated the holiday. Neither will I forget walking to school on Christmas Day, 1997 to grade a pile of quizzes. But focusing on these cultural differences can make us overlook an inconsistency of our own — that is, that we are also guilty of turning the holiday into something it was never intended to be.

A baby and a promise of peace. Christmas is not much more complicated than that.

Dirk Schouten teaches English as a second language in Korea. He is a member of Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont. He was greatly helped in this article by one of his students, Mi-Sun Shin, a sophomore student at Kosin University.

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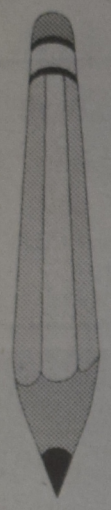

The year a pencil saved my Christmas

Patrick F. Caruso

During the 1930s it was difficult to ascertain which Christmas brought the bleakest holiday mood. One seemed to be as depressing and unfulfilling as the next. After all, the continent was struggling in its deepest economic doldrums, and we children were not exempt from its constraints.

As youngsters, we learned to accept and appreciate what meager gifts we received at Christmas. Though we never relinquished our qualified hopes, we were conditioned not to raise our expectations too high. A pencilbox, a book and a toy might well be the extent of our "windfall." But receiving gifts was not the sole indicator of a happy holiday — it was just as important to have the means to give gifts as it was to receive gifts.

Of course, the true meaning and spirit of the birth of our Lord remained paramount. However, if the measure of a "merry" Christmas was determined by the degree of holiday fulfillment — giving as well as receiving — we children were abandoned by the 1930s.

I was 15 years old in 1936 and desperate to get a part-time job after school to earn gift money. I was frustrated in not being able to buy suitable Christmas presents, especially for my parents. I combed the business area, door to door, asking store owners for the opportunity to work for them, but all to no avail.

As I awoke one Saturday morning in that dismal early December, my mother informed me I had to accompany her to shop for an ironing board. We did not own a car, so it was up to me as the oldest child to carry the ironing board home.

We arrived at the store, and while my mother was making her selection I asked the owner if he needed part-time help. The answer was the usual, "No, not at this time." My mother decided on her purchase, paid for it, and as we walked toward the door, the owner called to me to say he sold a clothes hamper which had to be delivered to the other side of town. Would I be interested in just that one delivery? I immediately responded in the affirmative and my mother approved. I placed the ironing board behind the counter. He gave me the hamper along with the address of the customer, the receipt I had to have her sign, a pencil and the bus fare.

I eagerly boarded the bus, though somewhat embarrassed carrying the cumbersome hamper, narrowly missing other passengers as I worked my way to the rear. We eventually reached my stop and I was forced to wedge my way to the exit. The other passengers must have been relieved to see me and the hamper leave the bus. But I still had to carry the hamper several blocks to the customer's address. I presented her with her purchase, she signed the receipt and I was on my way back to the store — mission completed.

I proudly told the owner all went well and handed him the signed receipt. He was pleased and paid me a nominal amount for my services. I thanked him as I picked up the ironing board and left the premises to wait for my bus home.

PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA

"We arrived at the store, and while my mother was making her selection I asked the owner if he needed part-time help."

The bus stop was just outside his door. It was in full view of anyone in the store, so the owner noticed that the first two buses passed me by because they were loaded to capacity. As the next bus finally approached the stop, I picked up the ironing board, stepped up on to the bus and placed my hand in my pocket to pull out my fare when I realized I still had the store owner's pencil. I quickly stepped off the bus and returned to the store. The startled owner greeted me at the door to ask why I got off the bus. When I explained I forgot to return his pencil, he was so impressed he offered me a job working on Saturdays to run errands, sweep the floor and deliver packages.

Words could not express the inner jubilation that came over me at the time. It was the opportunity that had eluded me for so long. I thanked him. Finally, I would be able to buy gifts for the family making it the merriest of my childhood Christmasses — owing it all to that pencil.

Patrick Caruso is a retired school superintendent who lives in Verone, N.J.

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Mrs. Jacoba van Duyvenvoorde
Mr. Cornelis & Mrs. Martha van Leeuwen
Mrs. Wieke Veenstra
Mrs. Bep Weststeyn
Mr. Henry & Mrs. Johanna Winter
Mrs. Margaret Zantingh
Mrs. Aukien Zeyl

WELCOME TO ALL READERS OF THIS ISSUE

Complimentary copies of this issue of have been distributed to members of Reformed and Christian Reformed congregations across Canada. In this issue we have foregone our usual news-oriented format in order to share these special Christmas experiences with our many friends — current and potential subscribers — in this holiday season.

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1 (800) 969-4838
Fax:(905) 682-8313
ccsubscrip@aol.com

One little boy

Berta Hosmar

The lounge looked rather deserted as I and our two-and-a-half-year old grandson, Levi, walked into the nursing home. Most of the residents who still had family and who were able to leave the home for a short period of time had been picked up to celebrate Christmas with loved ones. Only the severely disabled, the sick or the ones without family had remained.

About seven or eight people in wheelchairs sat dozing in a semi-circle in the lounge and only one nurse sat behind a desk, close to where my sister sat huddled in her wheelchair, face down, lost in a sad world of her own.

As always, when I saw her pitiful, skeleton-like figure and compared her heartbreakingly sad life with the richness of my own family life, I felt a sharp inner pain — and some anger at my God and her God, who had allowed this suffering to go on for so many years.

It would be so simple for him to deliver her and take her to her eternal home. But year after year "Not yet" was the answer to our prayers.

But today Levi did not give me a chance to think morbid thoughts. He had discovered a real live dog, the residents' pet, and within seconds, the dog, not used to much excitement in this place, was barking furiously as Levi was chasing him all over the lounge, trying in vain to climb on the animal's back.

Next, Levi discovered that the tile floor was an ideal racetrack, and on hands and knees he raced his car, bumping into wheelchairs and shouting with pleasure.

As always, when I brought a grandson, I noticed an immediate change in the behavior of the residents. My sister looked up, smiled at Levi and greeted me.

Margaret, a delightful lady in her 90s, started to move her wheelchair while grabbing another, empty one.

"This chair is for my mommy, she'll come and get me," she told me with a toothless grin. "Is that little boy your brother?"

Agatha, wearing yet another one of her vast collection of hats, opened her eyes and told me she was expected at her store, for she had to fill an order of 10 hats, ordered by the queen of England.

"Since that rascal of a husband left me for a young tramp I started this business. Who needs that scoundrel anyway?" she asked emphatically.

George, paralyzed from the waist down, told me it was so good to see a small child. "It gets pretty lonely here at times, especially since my wife died."

Other residents seemed more alert and were watching Levi, who, in the meantime, had discovered a shopping bag with unopened Christmas presents.

"Me open it please?" he asked the nurse, while dragging the bag across the floor.

The nurse, bless her heart, took Levi by the hand and planted him in the middle of the lounge.

"Yes, you may open the presents, and I'll tell you who to give them to," she said.

"These are gifts the staff and some volunteers wrapped up for the residents who have to stay here for Christmas" she explained to me.

"They are simple gifts, like socks and soft candies or toothbrushes or cookies. We were going to hand them out after dinner, but why not let this little guy help? It will cheer people up."

The next 10 minutes were pure joy. Levi went totally wild. Face flushed, eyes sparkling, he tore at ribbons, ripped wrapping paper and threw cards all over the floor. He ran from wheelchair to wheelchair and yelled: "For you, Mewwy Christmas!" while the dog, barking joyfully, ran after him.

All of a sudden the lounge was filled with smiling staff members, watching Levi and the dog and the residents.

When the last gift had been distributed, Levi, looking around for more adventures, discovered Margaret's empty wheelchair. His two-and-a-half-year old mind must have known that Christmas is connected with singing, for he climbed on the chair, waved his little hands like a real choir director and started to sing that most famous Christmas chestnut: "Jingle bells." Everybody who was able, joined in and when the song was finished, Agatha, in a quavering voice, began to sing: "Silent Night."

Again everybody joined in the singing but this carol created a more reverent atmosphere, and even Levi, with the sensitivity of a child, seemed to sense it. He quieted down considerably, while still directing his choir. George started to sing "O Come, All Ye Faithful," which was followed by "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

Now Levi decided he had had enough and he climbed down from his chair to sit on his great-aunt's lap, whose wheelchair happened to be the closest to him.

"Give everybody a kiss and a hug," she urged him gently, and obediently Levi skipped from wheelchair to wheelchair, and planted wet kisses on wrinkled cheeks, while the staff watched, some with tears in their eyes.

"Bring him again soon," said one nurse. "This was a real meaningful Christmas celebration, and all it took was one little boy."

Berta Hosmar is a freelance writer who lives in Whitby, Ont.

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Chuck: (905) 646-0199
Fax#: (905) 563-0301

Classifieds

Classified Rates

(Revised February 1, 1995)

Births	$25.00
Marriages & Engagements	$40.00
Anniversaries	$45.00
2-column anniversaries	$90.00
Obituaries	$45.00
Notes of thanks	$35.00
Birthdays	$40.00

All other one-column classified advertisements: $15.00 per column inch. NOTE: Minimum fee is $15.00 Letter under file number $35.00 extra. Photos: $25.00 additional charge.

Note: All rates shown above are GST inclusive

ATTENTION!

a) *Christian Courier* reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format.,

b) A sheet with information about an obituary sent by funeral homes is *not* acceptable since it leads to errors and confusion.

c) Photographs sent by fax *are not* acceptable. If you wish a photo included, send us the original.

d) *Christian Courier* will not be responsible for any errors due to handwritten or phoned-in advertisements.

e) The rate shown above for classifieds covers any length up to five column inches. *Christian Courier* reserves the right to charge for additional column inches at the rate of $15.00 per column inch (GST incl.).

NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS

We offer a one-year subscription for only $25.00 (GST incl.) to the couples whose wedding is announced in the *Christian Courier* and to the parents of the child whose birth announcement appears in our paper. To facilitate matters, we encourage those who request the wedding or birth announcement to enclose $25.00 and the couple's correct address.

Christian Courier
4-261 Martindale Rd.
St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1
Phone: (905) 682-8311
Fax: (905) 682-8313

Our new e-mail address:
ccadpromo@aol.com

Thank You

GEERTS:

Thanks for making my 80th birthday a wonderful day. Thanks for coming to our open house and sending cards. Also for cards and prayers during my sickness this year. But God did something wonderful for me that I could have my 80th birthday and slowly He gave me back my health.

All glory to Him.

G. Geerts, Hamilton, Ont.

Birthdays

An error was made in the Nov. 13 issue of this birthday announcement. Our apologies to Gisele, George & Kate.
The Dykstra family.

DYKSTRA:

Congratulations to Maaike Dykstra on her 80th birthday!

"The joy of the Lord is my strength. With great joy and thankfulness to the Lord we wish to announce the 80th birthday of our mother, Beppe and Oer Beppe

MAAIKE DYKSTRA
(nee DE HAAN)

Her thankful children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:
Chuck & Corrie Dykstra
Mary & Len (Aaron, Desirae), Sanya & Al (Lia, Monique, Helena), Eneka & John (Felicia, Mitchell, Sean), Gisele & George (Kate), Joel & Janice (Christina, Sjouke), John Michael & Rebecca (Maaike)
Frances & Mike Bylsma
Marjorie & Rob, Brian & Vickie, Mark
Al Dykstra
Renee & Mike (Brayden, Kevin), Al
Mart & MaryAnn Dykstra
Martin, Amanda, Nicolai
Teresa Shepherd
Jason Shepherd
Vanessa & John
Shirley & Brian Stouck
Lynda, Daniel, Erin
Ray & Joanne Dykstra
Joseph, Raymond, Thomas
Frank & Gail Dystra
Kendle
George & Donna Dykstra
Angela, Sarah, Jordan, Kalie
Greta & Brian Spielmacher
Wendy Dykstra
Jane & Gerard Dawe
Veronica & Garry Warden
Edward Dykstra
Address: 4133 Reg. Rd. 81, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

For Sale

For sale: **Three vinyl accordion style room dividers** with tracks and hardware (approx. 20 feet long by 8 feet high). Contact Jerry Kralt at **(905) 659-7638.**

Births

GEERTS - VANREENEN:

Bill and Lois VanReenen of Seaforth, Ont., and Herman and Margaret (Vanderlaan) Geerts of Dundas, Ont., praise the Lord for the safe arrival of their first grandchild

CALEB GEORGE HERMAN

born Oct. 7, 1998.
A beautiful, healthy son for George and Monica Geerts.
Parents' address: 278 Sanatorium Rd., Hamilton, ON L9C 2A1

Church News

Christian Reformed Church

Call extended and accepted:
— **Montreal** CRC and the board of Seaway Ministries (of classes Quinte and Eastern Canada) have extended a call to **Lloyd Burghart** of Rimbey, Alta., to serve as harbor chaplain.

Call declined:
— to Jarvis, Ont., **Rev. Herb de Ruyter** of Chilliwack, B.C.

Anniversaries

1943 December 30 1998

JELLE and SHIRLEY BERGSMA

With glory and praise to our Lord, we celebrate your 55th wedding anniversary Dad and Mom!
"Through your faithful prayers and the bountiful response of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, everything He wants to do in and through us will be done" (Phil. 1:19, The Message Bible).
Your loving and grateful kids, grandkids and greats:
Wilma & Bob Vanderkooi — Toronto, Ont.
Shane & Noga, Buck & Julie
Ted & Pat Bergsma — Calgary, Alta.
Wendy, Ryan
George & Sheila Bergsma — Burk's Falls, Ont.
Paul, Brad, Jody, Amanda, David & Liz (Rachel)
Joan & Ken Horlings — Bradford, Ont.
Melanie, Jennifer, Lori, Cheryl & Craig (Tori, Carly)
Frank & Sheila Bergsma — Errington, B.C.
Richard, Tammy & Tony (Amber, Alyssa), Tara-Lynn & Alan
Millie & Doug Dennis — Nanticoke, Ont.
Chris, Jeff & Cherie, Ashley
Elaine & Dale Money — Barrie, Ont.
Natalie, Tracy, Shawn, Holly
Al Bergsma & Dale — Emsdale, Ont.
Danielle, Erica
Open house will be held on Dec. 29, 1998, from 2 - 4 p.m., in Parkview Meadows, Townsend, Ont. No gifts please.
Address: 76 Town Centre Dr., Apt. 102, Valleyview, Townsend, ON N0A 1S0.
Phone: (519) 587-3240.

Anniversaries

On Dec. 15, 1998, we hope to celebrate with our parents

REMKES and JEANETTE KOOISTRA

their 55th wedding anniversary.
We thank God for giving them all these good years together. To mark this event and the occasion of Dad's — Rev. Dr. R. Kooistra — 55 years in the ministry, we are having an open house. This will be after the morning service on Dec. 20, 1998, at Waterloo Chr. Ref. Church. Dad hopes to preach as well at this time. The Waterloo Chr. Ref. Church is located at 209 Bearinger Rd., Waterloo, Ont., and the service starts at 10:30 a.m.
Everyone welcome! Best wishes only!
Congratulations Mom and Dad, we love you! From your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.
Address: Rev. Dr. and Mrs. R. Kooistra, 25 Westmount Rd. N., Apt. 1505, Waterloo, ON N2L 5G7

Obituaries

HILDA VISS
(VAN POLEN)

of 930 W. Main, Ripon, Calif., entered eternal rest on Nov. 16, 1998, at the age of 94.
Loving wife of Rev. Simon Viss.
Children:
Norman
Norma
Paul & Carolyn
Joyce & Joe VanderKwaak
12 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.
Preceded in death by sons Elward and Jay, grandson Jim and great-granddaughter Hannah.

Obituaries

Smilde, Dr. Belleville
the Neth. Ont.
March 19, 1918 - Nov. 7, 1998

On Saturday, Nov. 7, 1998, at the age of 80 the Lord took home our dear mother and Oma

ANTJE DE JONG
(nee RIDDER)

We will miss her greatly, but will rejoice with her for she has run the race and won.
"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith and now the time has come for me to stop fighting and rest" (2 Tim. 4:7).
Beloved wife of the late John De Jong of Belleville, Ont.
Dear Mother of:
Jane & Ben Stegeman — St. Catharines, Ont.
Dorothy & Simon Koopmans – Barrie, Ont.
Lisa De Jong — Belleville, Ont.
Uultsje & Francine De Jong — Abbotsford, B.C.
Dear Oma of:
John & Angela (Michael), Mark & Rennie (Tyler, Leah), Lori-Anne & David, Andrea, David, John, James, Matthew, Julie-Anne, Katelyn.
Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle breast.
There by his love o'er shaded, sweetly my soul shall rest.
Hark t'is the voice of angels, borne in a song to me.
Over the fields of glory — over the crystal sea.

Miscellaneous

Information is being sought from church members who initiated or are responsible for making their **church fragrance-free/allergy friendly**. Please contact **Cory Kuipers, 565 Nairn Dr., R.R. 2, Goderich, ON N7A 3X8, (519) 524-4459** or e-mail: **ckuipers@odyssey.on.ca**

Congratulations to Jelle and Shirley Bergsma on their 55th wedding anniversary!

Classifieds

Obituaries

1921 Psalm 23 1998
Our heavenly Father, in His infinite wisdom took unto Himself our husband, father, Pake and great-grandfather
JELLE (JACK) DE VRIES
peacefully at home, on Nov. 11, 1998, after a lengthy illness, in his 78th year.
Loving wife Anna DeVries.
Loving children:
Raymond & Lonny De Vries — Wellandport
Epp & Diana DeVries — Fenwick
Ann & Bill Van Lochem — Fenwick
Jessie & Ben Bruining — Port Dover
Vicky & Jim Stienstra — Vineland
Harry & Nancy De Vries — Grimsby
Leo & Margaret De Vries — Fenwick
John & Joanne — Smithville
Loving Pake of 29 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.
Predeceased by grandson Jeffery Bruining.
Funeral service was held at Bethany Chr. Ref. Church, Fenwick, Ont., on Nov. 14, 1998.
Correspondence address:
Anna DeVries, Box 277, 741 Welland Rd., Fenwick, ON L0S 1C0

Diever, Dr. Grimsby
the Neth. Ont.
Feb. 19, 1918 - Sept. 1, 1998
JAN (JOHN) KIERS
"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).
After a brief illness our father and opa was taken home to be with his Lord. He was predeceased by his loving wife Gerrediena (1994), his daughter Bertha (1982) and grandson Jason (1977). He will be remembered by his children and grandchildren:
Nick & Marlene Kiers — Grimsby, Ont.
Michael, Sandra, David, Sharon
John & Doreen Kiers — York, Ont.
Nicole, Jimmy, Jamie, Kenneth
Wilfred & Connie Kiers — Wellandport, Ont.
Jeremy, Bryan, Schott, Jacqueline, Richard, Robert
Andrew & Geri Kiers — Beamsville, Ont.
Grace Kiers — Hamilton, Ont.
He is also survived by brothers and sisters in the Netherlands. The funeral service was held in the Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church.

For Sale

For sale: SJOELBAKKEN: Dutch shuffleboards, hardwood, heavy duty. ($135 Cdn., $125 U.S., shipping incl.). **D. & J. Koomans, R.R. 3, Chatham, ON N7M 5J3.**
(519) 351-7667;
www.jra.on.ca./sjoelbak

Obituaries

New Glasgow Edmonton
N.S. Alta.
July 7, 1964 - Nov. 9, 1998
"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).
It pleased the Lord to take unto Himself our dear daughter and sister
ANN KLOK
at age 34.
Survived by her loving husband Richard Klok and dear daughter Maria.
Dear daughter of Gerald and Helen Bosch, Abbotsford, B.C.
Sister of:
Corrie & Marinus Schryver — Chilliwack, B.C.
JoAnn & Peter Dykstra — Abbotsford, B.C.
Casey — Edmonton, Alta.
Pete & Jane — Edmonton, Alta.
John — Port Coquitlam, B.C.
Stewart & Pauline — Sherwood Park, Alta.
Susan & Sid Wyngaarden — Abbotsford, B.C.
Aunt of several nieces and nephews.
Correspondence address: Gerald and Helen Bosch, 2164 Webster Court, Abbotsford, BC V2T 6L7

Klaaswaal Thunder Bay
the Neth. Ont.
1927 - 1998
"Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord" (Prov. 16:20).
The Lord in His wisdom called home my beloved wife, our mother, our Oma,
NEELTJE "NELLY" JOFFERS
on Sunday, Oct. 25, 1998.
Wife of Pieter Joffers.
Mother and Oma of:
Clara & Harry Prenger
Daniel, Kenneth, Robert, Katie, Nicole, Hendrik John
Aly & John Miedema
Michael, David, Matthew, Alyssa, Andrew
Kathleen Joffers
Glenda & John Dykstra
Janine, Corey, Mitchell, Charmaine
Correspondence address: Pieter Joffers, R.R. #5, Thunder Bay, ON P7C 5M9

For Rent

For rent: Boerderij (farm), all conveniences, summer and winter, in **Friesland**, the Neth. Reasonable. For information phone:
(519) 863-2096

For rent in Smithville, Ont., **basement apartment**. $550 p.m., fridge, stove and utilities incl. No smoking, no pets. Good for 1 or 2 adults. For more info. call **(905) 957-2596.**

Obituaries

Hallum, Fr. Chatham, Ont.
June 29, 1923 - Nov. 7, 1998
Gone to be with His Lord on Saturday, Nov. 7, 1998, our brother and brother-in-law
JELLE (JACK) VAN MARRUM
Beloved husband of Mary Van Marrum-Van Vliet.
By grace through His faith in Jesus Christ, His Lord, a child of God.
Predeceased by three brothers: Peter, Tjitze and Frank, and one sister-in-law Trijntje Van Marrum-Roukema.
With love:
Gerlof Van Marrum
Anna & John De Jager
Minke & Willem Pomp
Louw & Nita Van Marrum
Jeltje Enzlin-Van Marrum
Dora Van Marrum-Griffioen
Wikje Van Marrum-Roorda
Willie Van Marrum-Bergman
Interment was held on Tuesday, Nov. 10, 1998, at Maple Leaf Cemetery in Chatham, Ont.
Correspondence address:
Mary Van Marrum, 340 Naughton Ave., Chatham, ON N7L 2G9

After a short battle with cancer
JOHN GERRIT ZEYL
of Wellington St. N., Woodstock, Ont., passed away at his residence on Saturday, Nov. 21, 1998, in his 46th year.
Loved son of Aukien Zeyl-Agema and the late Wybe Zeyl.
Beloved husband of Annette (Nettie) H. Zeyl (nee Vandervecht).
Dear father of:
Jessica, Denise, Matthew and Eric
Dear brother of:
Jack & Crystel — Dundas
Don & Judy — Rhode Island
Jim & Alice — London
Thom & Aleida — Smithville
Also survived by several nieces and nephews.
The funeral and committal service was held at Knox Presbyterian Church, Woodstock, Ont., on Tuesday, Nov. 24, 1998, with Rev. Jan McIntyre officiating. Cremation followed.
Contributions to the Canadian Cancer Society would be appreciated.

Miscellaneous

How to LOCATE
everything *you own on*
Jan. 1, 2000
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In all good bookstores.
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Miscellaneous

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available 936 sq.ft. to 1235 sq.ft.
Fully wheelchair accessible, sprinkler system, central air, security throughout building. Dutch and English spoken. For more info. call **(519) 233-7296 or (519) 482-7862.**

De Nederlandse Courant

Trial subscription to De Nederlandse Courant. Canada's oldest Dutch newspaper only $10 for 6 months (13 issues). To subscribe, call **toll-free 1-800-COURANT**.

Teachers

ST. CATHARINES, Ont.: Beacon Chr. High School invites applications for a **maternity leave position in the area of English and drama** beginning in mid-March of 1999. Applicants need to be qualified and need to demonstrate a love for God, a love for students, and a love for English. Please send resume and relevant information to:
Ted Harris, Principal
Beacon Chr. High School
2 OMalley Drive
St. Catharines, ON L2N 6N7
Fax: (905) 937-1130

Job Opportunities

PASTOR
Houston Chr. Ref. Church in beautiful northwest British Columbia is seeking a **full-time pastor** to provide sound biblical preaching, ministry to youth and pastoral care. The church membership stands at 67 families; which translates into 169 professing members and 154 non-professing or baptized members. Please send a copy of your profile. A church profile is available upon request. For more information please contact:
Rick Delau, Search Committee
Houston Chr. Ref. Church
Box 6, Houston, BC V0J 1Z0
Phone: (250) 845-7756
Fax: (250) 845-7578

Teachers

RIMBEY, Alta.: Rimbey Chr. School, located in Central Alberta, is accepting applications for a High School/Junior High position, starting February 1999.
Rimbey Chr. School is a vibrant, interdenominational school with 150 students, K-12. We are looking for a dynamic Christian individual for math, physics and phys ed subjects.
Please send resumes to:
Mr. Henry Vandermeer, Principal
Rimbey Chr. School
Box 90, Rimbey, AB T0C 2J0
Phone/Fax: (403) 843-3904
E-mail: richrsc@telusplanet.net

Job Opportunities

Located in an attractive city on the scenic shores off Lake Huron, **Lambton Christian School** is a parentally run Christian school recognized for offering a quality education from Kindergarten to OAC. A non-denominational school serving 280 students and their families, operating on two campuses in Sarnia, Lambton Chr. School Society is currently seeking a

Director of Education
and Principal of the Secondary School

Our vision for the future includes expansion of the student body and supporting community, and continued development of an integrated Christian curriculum directed by an effective administrative team. The qualified candidate will be an educator, preferably an experienced, certified principal, with demonstrated success in leadership positions within the Christian education and/or business community. The ability to clearly articulate an integrated Christian worldview and its implications for education is mandatory. This newly created, full-time position, will be filled by an innovative, creative individual capable of directing and leading a period of growth. If you feel challenged by this role, send your curriculum-vitae, a statement of faith, and your philosophy of Christian education to:
Search committee, Lambton Chr. School Society
c/o Lambton Chr. High School
295 Essex Street, Sarnia, ON N7T 4S3, Phone: (519) 337-9122
For further information, contact Dick Metselaar, Search Committee Chair at (519) 383-1268 or e-mail to: tdegroot@ebtech.net or fax to: (519) 869-2328 (application deadline, Jan. 4, 1999).

Classifieds

Teachers

DRAYTON, Ont.: Calvin Chr. School is looking for a **teacher** to fill a maternity leave position. You will be teaching a **Grade 1 / 2** class of 21 students starting on the Monday following Spring Break and going to the end of June. If you have a Christian School Teacher Certificate and/or an Ontario Teacher Certificate and would like to join an energetic staff and if you love to teach young children, we would like to hear from you. Please send a letter of application and resume to:

Calvin Chr. School
Box 141 High Street
Drayton, ON N0G 1P0
Att.: Willy Katerberg, Principal
by December 10, 1998.

WOODBRIDGE, Ont.: Toronto District Chr. High School requires an additional full-time teacher for second semester. Needed is a teacher for **Grade 9** courses (**science, English, geography**). Please send resume, credentials and statement of faith to:

Ren Siebenga
c/o Toronto District Chr. High School
377 Woodbridge Avenue
Woodbridge, ON L4L 2S8
e-mail: rsiebeng@tdchristian.on.ca

Miscellaneous

ONE TO ANOTHER
Christian companion magazine.
Hundreds of readers Canada-wide.
Single issue $5.
Write to:
#12 923 2nd Ave. S.
Lethbridge, AB T1J 0C7

Job Opportunities

Ottawa Christian School
is seeking applications for the position of
PRINCIPAL

Our school is a vibrant and growing non-denominational community of 200 students and 11 teachers. We offer a strong educational program from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8. We are looking for an energetic and dynamic leader with a strong vision for the development of Christian education in the nation's capital, and the ability to communicate that vision to the community. The position includes both teaching and administrative responsibilities.
Interested candidates are invited to submit a letter of application and curriculum vitae before **Dec. 31, 1998**, to:

Principal Search Committee
c/o Mr. I. Shugart
2286 Rembrandt Rd., Ottawa, ON K2B 7P5
For further information, please call (613) 596-2619
Ottawa Chr. School is a member of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools.

PRINCIPAL

London Parental Christian School is currently accepting applications for the position of Principal. Located in **London**, Ont., the London Parental Christian School is a K-8 school with an enrolment of 215 students and a teaching staff of 14 teachers. Applicants must be spiritually mature active Christians with administrative abilities and a strong commitment to Christian education. Candidates must demonstrate a strong vision for Christian education and strengths in the areas of visionary leadership, staff development and team building.
Please forward resume, a minimum of 4 references, a statement of faith and a statement of philosophy of Christian education to:

Peter Van Geest, Principal Search Committee Chair
74 Breton Park Cres., London, ON N5W 1N1
(519) 455-9014
Application deadline is Dec. 21, 1998.

Job Opportunities

The Christian Labour Association of Canada
has an opportunity in

PUBLICATION LAY-OUT/DESIGN

This position will require work in a team environment with primary responsibility for the layout, design, and production oversight of CLAC publications and Internet presence. This includes The Guide, regular newsletters, brochures, other publications and website. Applicants must have formal training or significant experience in graphic design, be fluent in Quark Xpress (4.0 or 3.3), and familiar with image editing software. HTML and photographic skills are definite assets. The position will also include some research and writing assignments and other administrative duties. Above average language skills are required. Applicants must support the Christian principles and policies on which CLAC is based.

Letters of application, together with resume and references, should be received no later than **Jan. 8, 1999**, by:

Mr. Ed Grootenboer, Executive Director
5920 Atlantic Dr., Mississauga, ON L4W 1N6
Tel.: (905) 670-7383/Fax: (905) 670-8416
e-mail: egrootenboer@clac.ca
Applicants must be prepared to provide samples of their work.

Youth/Worship Leader Position

Trinity Chr. Ref. Church is now accepting resumes for a **Youth Co-ordinator or Youth and Worship Co-ordinator**. Committed Christians with a passion for working with youth and leading worship are encouraged to apply. Trinity Chr. Ref. Church is located in Abbotsford, B.C., 45 min. East of Vancouver, in the heart of the scenic Fraser Valley.
Send resumes by **Dec. 31, 1998**, to:

Attention: Staffing Committee/Box 51
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Christmas in Heaven

I see the countless Christmas trees,
That dot the world below
With tiny lights, like heaven's stars,
Reflecting on the snow.

The sight is so spectacular,
Please wipe away that tear,
For I'm spending Christmas day
With Jesus Christ this year.

I hear the many Christmas songs
That people hold so dear.
But all these sounds cannot compare
With the Christmas choir up here.

I have no words to let you know
The joy their voices bring;
It is beyond imagining
To hear an angel sing.

I know you miss me very much,
I sense your pain of heart.
But I am not so far way.
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Be happy for me, closest one,
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Be glad I'm spending
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Evaluation of applications begins Dec. 1, 1998, and continues until the position is filled. To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest that provides evidence of that commitment and a curriculum vitae to Dr. Rockne McCarthy; Dordt College; 498 4th Ave. NE; Sioux Center, IA 51250; facsimile 712-722-4496; e-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu

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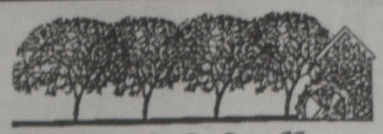
The Hekman Library (http://www.calvin.edu/library/) **of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary** (Christian Reformed Church in North America) invites **nominations and applications for the position of Digital Resources Librarian**. The librarian leads the team responsible for designing, implementing, and maintaining a content-rich, well-organized digital library collection. The librarian plays a primary role in determining strategic and operational direction for the management, structure, and content of the digital library. Recognizing the needs of users and providing high-quality instruction are essential components of this position. The librarian also is a member of the Reference and Instruction Team responsible for reference service and instruction to the entire Calvin community and for liaison services to selected academic departments.

Minimum qualifications are a MLS; commitment to the Reformed (Calvinist) faith, experience in web design and page editors and other essential computer programs; experience in an academic library setting; demonstrated competency with microcomputer hardware and software and client/service technology; and experience in teaching and training.

Send a cover letter, resume, and names, addresses, and e-mail addresses of at least three references to **Connie Bellows, Director of Human Resources, Calvin College, 3201 Burton SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546. Deadline is Jan. 22, 1999.**

Miscellaneous



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Classifieds

Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous	Events

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Christmas Celebration

Join the Liberation Choir in an evening of song and Scripture readings. The Christmas sing along will be held on **Friday, Dec. 18, 1998, at 8 p.m.**, at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, 70 James St. South, **Hamilton**, Ont. The choir is under the direction of Willem Van Suydam and accompanied by Dr. John Vander Tuin. Your admission is a free will offering for the Russian ministry of the Back to God Hour.

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Celebration

It is with thankfulness to our faithful Lord that the Waterloo Chr. Ref. Church celebrates both the **55th anniversary of Rev. Remkes Kooistra's ordination** and the **55th wedding anniversary** of

Rev. and Mrs. Kooistra.

From Rev. Kooistra's time in Holland, where his first sermon was on James 1:22, to the present in Waterloo, Ont., he though now retired, has been a doer of the Word. The Waterloo Chr. Ref. Church has been blessed by his ministry, preaching and teaching. For that we want to publicly thank our God and Father. We also want to join the Kooistras and their family in celebrating their 55 years of marriage. They have been united and faithful servants of their Lord and Savior.

The Lord willing, **Rev. Kooistra will preach on the 20th of December at 10:30 a.m.**, in the Waterloo Chr. Ref. Church. We invite all those who have been blessed by Rev. and Mrs. Kooistra's ministry to join us for this service and to congratulate them both after the worship service.

The Waterloo Chr. Ref. Church is at 209 Bearinger Road in Waterloo (519) 746-5727

Calendar of Events

Please submit only brief items. Placement is subject to space availability. Lengthy, multiple-event announcements will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit the material and to charge a nominal, per issue fee per item inserted.

Dec.4-Dec. 9 CPJ's 35th Anniversary Celebrations - attend an evening of thankfulness and reflection. Call CPJ at (416) 979-2443 or 1-800-667-8046 for info. about your area's event. **Dec. 4: Toronto, ON; Dec. 8: St. Catharines, ON; Dec. 9: London, ON.**

Dec. 5 and 6 The musical "The Life" written by Michael Card, Jubilee Fellowship CRC (13 Wilholme Dr.) **St. Catharines**, Ont., at 8 p.m. For info. call (905) 687-3372

Dec. 12 Christmas concert by the Ontario Chr. Music Assembly under the direction of Leendert Kooij. Andre Knevel (organ), in the Central United Church (King & Young Sts.) **Welland**, Ont., at 8 p.m. Admission $10. For info. call (905) 835-8583.

Dec. 12 "Komt allen tezamen." Dutch kerstzang avond in the Immanuel CRC, Mohawk Rd. W. **Hamilton**, Ont., at 7:30 p.m.

Dec. 16 Christmas concert by the Ontario Chr. Music Assembly under the direction of Leendert Kooij. Andre Knevel (organ), in the Maranatha CRC, **Bowmanville**, Ont., at 8 p.m. Admission: Adults $10, Students $6, Children under 12 free. For info. call (905) 623-7196

Dec. 18 Organ recital by Jonathan Oldengarm, 7:30 p.m., Central Presbyterian Church. **Hamilton**. Ont. Info.: (519) 338-3214.

Dec. 18 An evening of song and Scripture reading with the Liberation Choir under the direction of Willem Van Suydam at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church (70 James St. S.) **Hamilton**, Ont., 8 p.m.

Dec. 19 Christmas concert by the Ontario Chr. Music Assembly under the direction of Leendert Kooij. Andre Knevel (organ), in the Willowdale United Church (Kenneth Avenue), **Willowdale**, Ont., at 8 p.m. Admission: Adults $10, Students $6, Children under 12 free. For info. call (416) 636-9779

Dec. 19 Annual Christmas sing along concert with the St. Thomas ladies' choir and the St. Thomas male choir in Knox Presb. Church, **St. Thomas**, Ont., at 7:30 p.m. Free-will offering towards Christmas Care.

Dec. 20 Celebration of 55 years of ministry of Rev. Remkes Kooistra at the Waterloo CRC (209 Bearinger Rd.), **Waterloo**, Ont.

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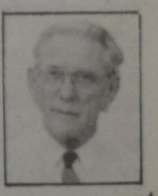
Herewith I would like to wish the readers of Christian Courier a Blessed Christmas and especially all those who, by their kind words of encouragement, prayer and financial support have made it possible for me during the last 15 years to share God's healing, forgiving and restoring grace with several thousand imprisoned persons.



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Wishing our members and friends God's blessing during this season and throughout the coming year.

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Tine and Harry Houtman
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Good News for 1999...

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding...

Isaiah 11.1-2a

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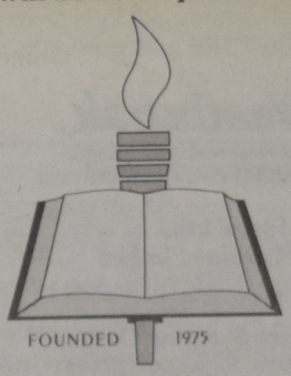

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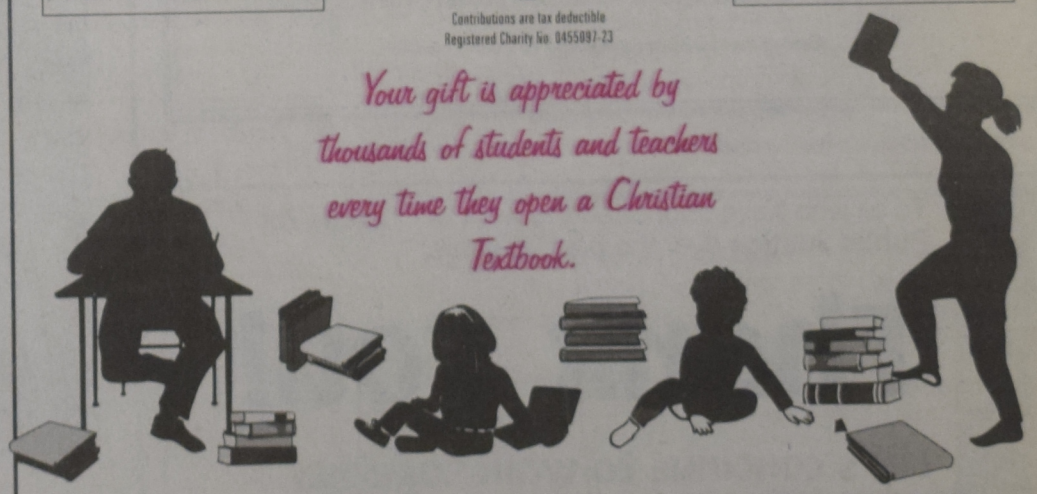

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The Christmas I sang with Lanza

Wally Goossen

Christmas Eve was different that year, 1968; not at all like the Christmas of 1947 when I was five.

When St. Nicholas, accompanied by the Christ Child, towered over me in a little Bavarian village and permanently disillusioned me by impersonating the village grocer, my suspicions about the generous but frightening gentleman with the booming voice culminated in a full-blown skepticism as Herr Fux's big brown eyes danced in a framework of white hair and beard.

Nor was Christmas Eve 1968 anything like that of 1948, my first Canadian Christmas, when after years of war-inflicted poverty I walked into the Nutcracker wonderland of our living room to discover a brand new pair of skates under the tree, with tiny fairies dancing on the shimmering blades like reflecting beams of Christmas tree lights.

On these Christmasses of my childhood I was surrounded by my family — my mother, sister Eleonore and brother Alfred. I say surrounded because during the loneliness of the war years, when transitory friendships between homeless people often lasted but an hour in a bread line, they were the world to me.

But on Christmas eve 1968 I was alone.

My brother lived in the U.S. now, where his job took him. I was still in Hamilton, Ontario. My sister lived 25 miles away with her family in Grimsby. Mom and I shared a small apartment. It had been many years since the family was last together for Christmas.

I heard Mom getting ready to go to Eleonore's for Christmas Eve supper as I watched from the front window. Dusk settled over the street and a slight flurry of snow whitened the shadowy lawns of the neighboring houses in answer to some child's prayer.

"Are you sure you don't want to come along?" pleaded my mother one more time. I answered without turning my head, a natural histrionic device subconsciously employed to etch into her heart the depth of my despair and loneliness — and self-pity.

"No." Nothing more. All day she had persuaded me, but each no was more dramatic and satisfying. If the world could reject me, I could reject the world. I had been recently discharged from the psychiatric hospital. It didn't take long to assume there was, for me, no place on the "outside," and I didn't want to be back in "there."

The cover of Wally Goossen's beloved Mario Lanza album.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

The door slammed shut as Mom left with a mixture of joy and sadness. A profound peace and solitude enveloped me, the house, the whole world — the solitude of total rejection. I wanted nothing to do with the world. Outside, snowflakes large and white teemed down in a joyful whorling, whirling dance as the sky grew darker, but their joy left me unmoved. Only their cold, pure whiteness which cooled the hot unspent tears evaporating in my self-contained heart before they could surface, comforted me by blotting the visible world out of my sight and mind.

All the loneliness of the world drowned me in a cosmic isolation known only to some small star in an unknown part of the universe.

All the loneliness of the world — the loneliness of the war years; the loneliness of an illness which separated me from family, friends and all that life and the cliches taught in school and church promised; and the loneliness of a weary couple struggling along a dark night on the way to Bethlehem — drowned me in a cosmic isolation known only to some small star in an unknown part of the universe.

It was then I remembered my friend Mario Lanza. You may have heard of him. He was a singer. He had made a Christmas record for a few million of his friends. I was among them.

I played the record over and over again. The passionate quality of his clear voice enhanced by the sincere devotion of his devout heart was not diminished by my tearful accompaniment. My grandfather had been a noted singer at weddings in our Russian Mennonite villages a thousand years or so earlier, before wars and revolutions interrupted the normal flow of things. I inherited something of his gift, although out of shyness I sang for no one but Lanza. Not once did he find fault.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" Our voices, alone in the galaxy but for the heavenly host which accompanied us unseen, filled the little-town stillness of the heavens above my window as Christmas stars danced and swept in and out of our song like bits of silver tinsel twinkling in the light of candles.

Again and again Mario and I together scaled our worshipful crescendos as I thrilled to the sense of my own power, my own wholeness. We sang in loneliness, but in worship and in a peace devoid of human conflicts, human criticisms and self-consciousness. We sang in the presence of God. None but the Lord and Mario (who in his earliest days had such moments alone too when opera "lovers" resented his love for all music, and thought it was up to them to decide how great God's gift to him was or was not) really knew me, really knew the wholeness within me. "They" could neither see me or hear me.

"Guardian angels round my head...." I joined in again and again. It was not just a song to him. Before he died, still a young man, he said to have seen angels surrounding him. These were the angels he sang of — the real ones.

I still have his record. I still play it at Christmas — and sing along. But now my wife listens, with a smile. I may not have inherited too much from grandfather after all but sometimes I am still briefly alone — and I sing.

Mario never complains. Together now with the Christ Child he hears the song of the heart, the song he, too, sang. And someday, Scripture says, we will sing together accompanied by the heavenly host and our friends and families — at least those who have learned to sing for the heavenly Father.

Until then I'll be quite content to just bring a smile to my wife's heart.

Wally Goossen is a free lance writer who lives in Dundas, Ontario.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Children's Books

Books to make a child's Christmas rich and meaningful

Jeanette Romkema

I recently purchased Michael Schwartzentruber and Kathy Sinclair's *Simplify and Celebrate: Embracing the Soul of Christmas (1997)*, hoping for suggestions on how to enjoy a more meaningful Christ-focused Christmas. Living overseas for more than a third of my life I always found this to be the most difficult time of the year to visit North America, my family and friends. Presents, parties, wrapping, cards, wish lists and all that Christmas brings seemed overwhelming at times.

Ironically, now that I have come back to my birthplace to live and work I find myself falling prey to all those things that troubled me during my visits. It is often difficult to experience the peace, joy, and hope promised by the birth of Jesus when everything around us seems to be offering a different message.

Below you will find a review of five children's books which can be used to help make your Christmas more rich and meaningful. Children's literature works in mysterious, compelling ways to enlarge readers' and listeners' lives, and it possesses powers to move even the coldest hearts.

These are books that can be read with the family around the Christmas tree, with children or grandchildren before they go to bed, with children during Sunday school or children's worship, and in the classroom.

The books have been selected for their ability to convey a sense of quality both inside and out, and for their ability to stimulate thinking and discussion about what messages the Christmas season holds for God's people.

Considering the 'visual text'

You will note that I have chosen to focus more of my comments on the illustrations, which I often refer to as the visual text, than the written text. I do this for three reasons: 1) many of the books deal with the biblical story of Christ's birth, often quoting directly from the Bible, which makes the need for "review" unnecessary; 2) young children often "read" the pictures as they listen to the written story; or use them to inform what they read, which calls for a review of the visual text; and, 3) I have chosen these books for their unique visual text and non-traditional styles of illustrating.

I have given an approximate reading level for each book, but this is meant only as a guide to which readers would have skills to read the written text, *not* for who can enjoy these books. Children's books such as these are ageless!

All the books are 1998 publications, except *The Christmas Miracle* of Jonathan Toomey (1995). This has been included because it deserves revisiting. This classic is my family's traditional Christmas read and is a blessing in the home.

The books were all purchased at the Children's Book Store in Toronto, but are widely available.

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey

By Susan Wojciechowshi. Illustrated by P.J. Lynch.

Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 1995. 36 pp. Grade 3 and up. ISBN 1-56402-320-6. Hardcover. $18.95 (Cdn), 15.95 (US).

Jonathan Toomey is the best woodcarver in the valley and spends his days carving beautiful shapes from pine and hickory and chestnut wood. Despite his passion for his work, he is a very sad man and always keeps to himself.

One day in early December, the widow McDowell and her seven-year-old son, Thomas, visit Jonathan to ask if he could carve a copy of the Christmas creche which they had recently lost in their move to the area.

Although the woodcarver somewhat begrudgingly agrees to take the job, and even agrees to allow Thomas watch the creative process, there is no way for Jonathan to know the miracle to which this arrangement will lead.

P.J. Lynch is an artist who understands the elements and power of visual language. The magnificent watercolor paintings in this book celebrate the richness of Susan Wojciechowski's moving tale. As well, they offer insights into the deep sorrow Jonathan lives dealing with the loss of his wife and child.

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey is a "must have" for every home, library and classroom. It is one that demands to be shared, and its message of hope and the power of God's healing grace can be experienced by all ages.

What Can I Give Him?

Based on a poem by Christina Rossetti. Illustrated by Debi Gliori.

New York: Holiday House, 1998. 28 pp. Grade 2 and up. ISBN 0-8234-1392-6. Hardcover. $25.95 (Cdn).

Two young girls in two parallel stories are faced with a very difficult choice: what can you give the most special person you know?

The story on the left side of each page tells of a poor young girl in Bethlehem trying to finish her evening chores of fetching water from the well, and of her surprise at finding Mary and Joseph with their newborn baby in a stable.

The story on the right side of the page entwines itself with the other through a young contemporary girl's search for the greatest gift she can give to her dearly loved grandfather.

By cleverly dividing the pages into two sections, this book offers the reader an interesting experience in which past meets present, young meets old, fact meets fiction, hopelessness meets the gift of life, giver meets receiver.

The first and last stanzas of the poem *In the Bleak Midwinter* by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) simply and eloquently offer the traces of a story to both the past and present. Although the reader may try to cross-reference one illustration with another from the poem, the lack of direct connection, and the fluid-like interpretation gives this books a rich quality.

What Can I give Him? extends our understanding of children's literature in its offering of a double tale and poetic text. It provides the stimulus for dramatic interpretation and would be the source of rich discussion of our understanding of the Christmas story: its real meaning; what true giving means; the ultimate gift. A great book for one-on-one reading.

The Story of the Nativity

By Geraldine McCaughrean. Conceived, designed and illustrated by Ruth Wickings.

New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1998. 24 pp. Grade 3 and up. ISBN 0-385-32631-9. Hardcover.

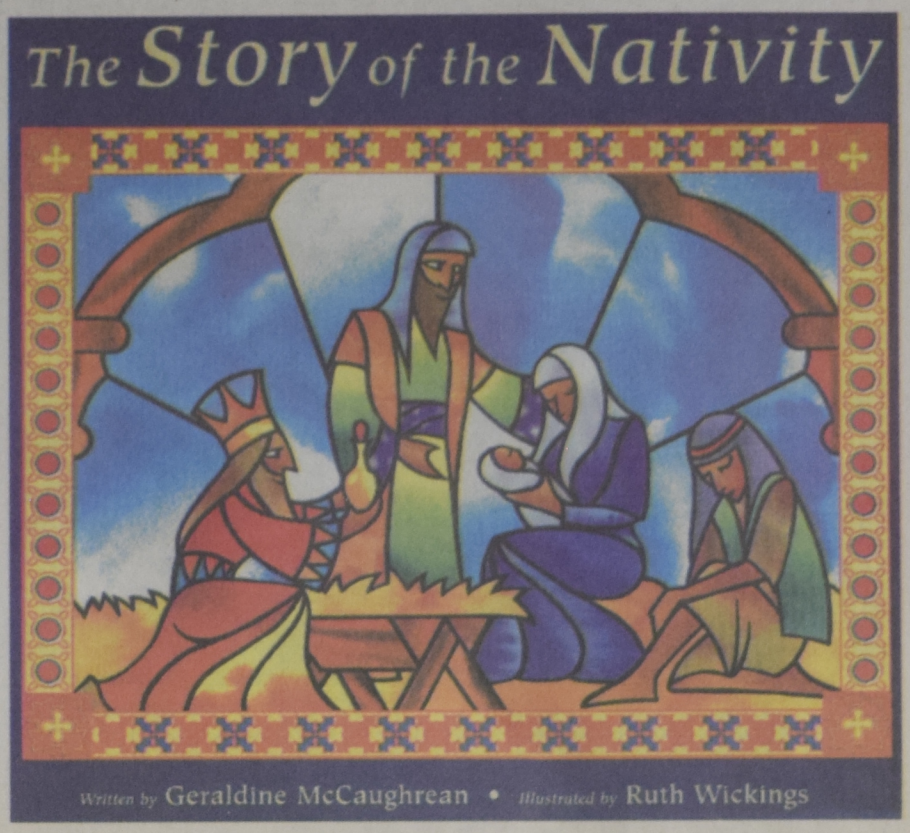
The Story of the Nativity offers a unique adaptation of the Christmas story: "God will take care of everything," said the angel, bending over Mary. His winged hadow cooled her. His words calmed her fear. "You will give birth to a child and name him Jesus, and he will save mankind from the dark" (p. 1).

Through easy-to-understand lyrical prose, large print and contemporary English, Geraldine McCaughrean wrote this story to assist young readers in their understanding of Christ's miracle birth.

I have chosen this book because of its unique art work. Using paper "stained-glass" illustrations accomplished by a double-page black outline over painted wax paper, readers are artificially brought into a church-like space where biblical stories are communicated through various visual texts displayed inside church buildings, i.e., stained-glass windows, banners, paintings and the like. Rich in color and design, each page is brilliantly framed on parchment-like paper.

This book can be shared in various settings but, due to its tactual quality, begs to be touched. It is a welcome change from many of the more somber children's Christmas books which often offer excerpts from the biblical text and traditional techniques of illustrating, i.e., paintings as seen from the horizontal view-point.

It is also an inspirational book to read for those creating stained-glass paperworks to hang in the window during the Christmas season.



The Christmas Story

According to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (King James Bible). Illustrated by Gennady Spirin.

New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998. 32 pp. Grade 4 and up. ISBN 0-8050-5292-5. Hardcover. $24.95 (Cdn), $19.95 (US).

The story of the birth of Christ, celebrated around the world at Christmas, is one of the most beautiful in the New Testament. *The Christmas Story* offers this story according to the gospels of Matthew and Luke as found in the King James Bible. It presents the story of the birth of Christ from Mary's meeting with the angel Gabriel to the birth of baby Jesus in the stable and the visit of the shepherds and Wise Men.

Russian-American, multi-award winning Gennady Spirin has been described as an artist who "truly represents the child's picture book as an object of art." The tempera, watercolor and pencil drawings on watercolor paper create the breath-taking illustrations in Russian-Orthodox iconographic style that make up this exquisite book.

Although the written text is one we know, the visual text deepens our understanding of this miracle birth. A sense of awe is felt at the sight of the two-page look at the "multitude of the heavenly host praising God" found in the centre of the book.

It is difficult to image Christmas without the reading of the Christmas story, and the works of art illustrating this version make *The Christmas Story* a highly recommended book to share at this time of the year.

This would be a very special addition to any library or private collection, and a treasured gift.

The Christmas Candle

By Richard Paul Evans. Illustrated by Jacob Collins.

New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1998.p. 32 pp. Grade 4 and up. ISBN 0-689-82319-3. Hardcover. $23.50 (Cdn).

One snowy Christmas Eve, a young man named Thomas buys a special Christmas candle from a mysterious old chandler for his lantern, which is about to expire. Although unaware of it, this purchase will turn out to be a life-changing one, as it teaches the young man about charity, brotherly/sisterly love, and grace.

The Christmas Candle is unique in that the visual and written text do little reflecting and supporting of each other. Jacob Collins does not feel the need to tell a long and complex story through his paintings, but instead, offers the reader an opportunity to experience well-chosen details of the story and its characters.

Being a master of painting the qualities of light, and having an ability to paint the eyes as "windows to the soul," Collins allows us to see, with him, children's literature as few do: as works of art. Collins' own style is reminiscent of that of the 17th century Dutch Masters.

This somewhat disturbing story, similar to the difficult lessons Scrooge had to learn in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, invites discussion about the meaning of the Christmas season and reflections on those less fortunate people who are unable to enjoy a traditional Christmas meal, presents and festivities.

Jeanette Romkema lived and worked in Europe, Asia and Africa for 13 years as an artist, educator and development worker. She currently lives in Toronto and is a doctoral student at OISE-University of Toronto working in the area of children's literature.

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At the conclusion of a year of unparalleled blessings, Redeemer College students, employees and board members pause to thank our God for His greatest blessing, the gift of His Son. In this Christmas season, may you and those dear to you see the True Light which gives light to all in this world and experience the peace of knowing Him.

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A Joy-filled Christmas!

From the CC staff

BERT WITVOET

Clockwise from top left: Diane Klein, Marian Van Til, Grace Bowman, Alan Doerksen, Ingrid Torn, Bert Witvoet.